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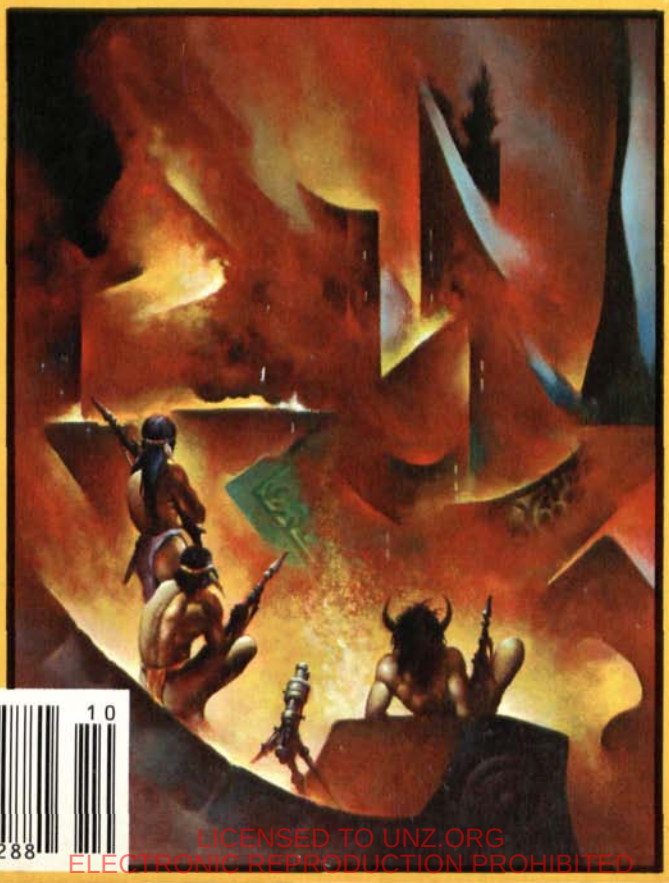

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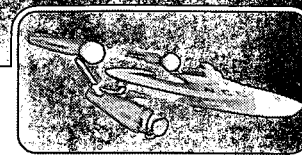

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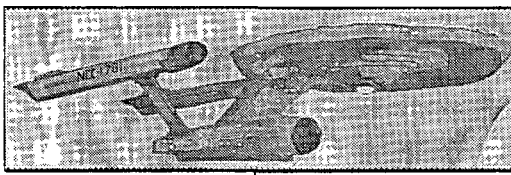

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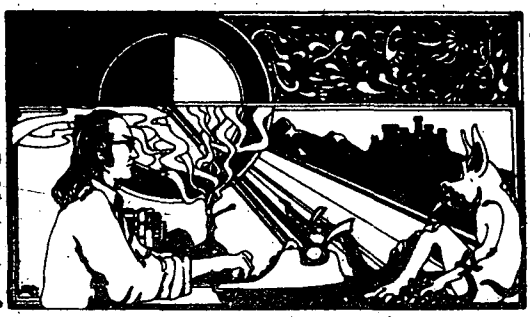
TED WHITE editorial



THE NATURE OF REALITY.: This magazine is a fantasy magazine, and as such rarely deals with the "real world" of the here and now. Yet, what is more "real" than fantasy?

The answer is, perhaps surprisingly, that "fantasy" and "reality" were one and the same until relatively recent times—that only with the dawn of our present technological civilization were the two sundered—and the literary genre of fantasy created.

Most of us are familiar with the "roots of science fiction" histories which alternately proclaim that stf had its roots in the days of the ancient Greeks or perhaps in *Frankenstein*. Most of these histories acknolwedge the deeper, broader roots of fantasy—as a genre—and usually with a nod to Homer. What they fail to acknowledge is that these ancient fantasies were not *perceived* as fantasy by their audiences, and the *label*, "fantasy," did not exist.

It has been suggested that the development of the conscious, introspective mind is, culturally, rather recent—dating only to the widespread rise of literacy in the public. This may seem startling to some of you, for it seems unlikely that the human race could have undergone an evolutionary advance of such proportions within only the last few hundred years—two thousand or so at the most.

Yet no development of this sort is ever unilateral—there are many places on our planet where literacy is still largely unknown—and indeed even in our present technologically refined culture there are those who still exist in what I might describe as a "pre-conscious" state.

I knew one such person quite well. At one time this person told me that he had never introspected—never *thought to himself*. "How do you make decisions?" I asked, puzzled. "I have a hard time," was the reply. "Don't you *know* what you want to do in a given situation?" I wondered. The answer was no.

The present theory is that humanity existed for most of our time on this planet in a pre-conscious state. What we regard as the "conscious mind" did not exist in most people—although surely there were exceptions throughout history. Most people lived lives of daily drudge-work, requiring all of their waking energy. Apparently their thoughts were directed to the moment-to-moment occurrences of their lives. Contemplation was rare.

Coupled with this was a sense of unchangingness. One was born to a specific cultural position, was raised to perform adequately in that position, and held it until death. The life of one's parents was echoed in one's own life and those of one's children. Introspection would probably breed only discontent with one's lot—there was little need for it.

Yet people then were essentially

(cont. on page 118)

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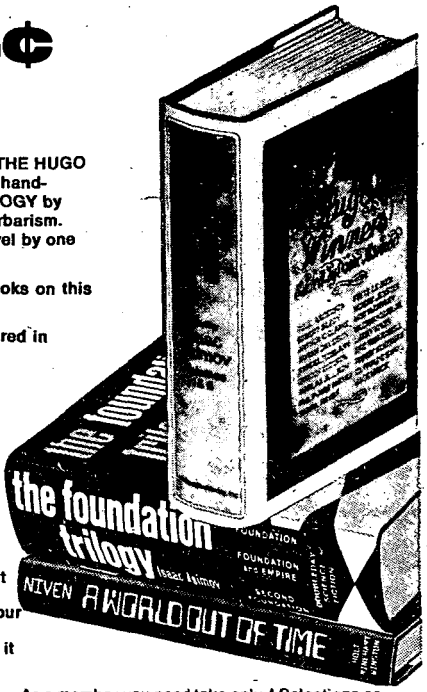

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THE MESA IS A LONELY PLACE TO DREAM AND SCREAM AND DREAM

Is this the way our civilization will end? Not with a bang, but with a gradual breakdown . . . which may already be in process?

GRANIA DAVIS

THE DESERT COUNTRY is a land of geometric forms. Triangular cinder cones: the luminous circles of the sun and the moon, straight lines and jagged angles of the soaring rocks. And all of it covered by the infinite vastness of the blue, blue sky. The geometry of the desert is reflected in the art of the Indians who live here. We fell in love with the desert country when we first saw it—fell in love and were afraid.

It sure seemed like a good idea to come here. We had to get away from San Francisco, where things were getting gruncho and worse. Urban life was reduced to a common denominator of terror and paranoia. The Kuwait Caliphate pulled the noose ever more tightly around our economic neck. And the gun toting bands of guerrilla warriors began to dominate the urbs with their upraised fists.

There were the black groups, the brown groups, the Irish and Arab groups, the Jewish defense groups, the Puerto Rican Liberation groups, and the Chinese Tong groups. There were fem groups and gay groups. Anyone who wasn't a group member was a piggy. And the only good piggy was a dead piggy.

Inevitably, they began to blastout among themselves, and the urb became a nightmare of barricades, barbed wire, and incendiary bombs. At least the bombs didn't get sent in the mail anymore, because the mail was no longer being delivered.

We lived on a pretty comfo, well-organized block, and I tried to stay close to home. We all took turns doing armed sentry duty against roving guerrilla bands, or against the packs of large dogs, sometimes rabid, that roamed the streets. People had bought these dogs for protection, but it became far too inflato to feed them. And the facilities of the Humane Society were taken over by the gov to hold and dispose of political prisoners. So the dogs were released to prowl the streets.

It was Wednesday, the rather scary day that this little piggy usually went

Illustrated by STEVE FABIAN

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to market with the other armed fems of the shopping patrol. Our block doesn't have a ration-super, but the next block does, so we go there. They know us now, cause we come for our allotment every week, so they're pretty informal about the passes and the search.

We had reciprocal agreements with several blocks that had necessary trade goods. Our block had an old Woolworth's with lots of useful junko. And a doctor—my husband. Blocks without any trade goods were going starvo, we heard.

We stood in line for over an hour for our allotment. Thank *Om* for soybeans. I'm sure we'd all be dead without them. If they're cooked right, they taste almost like meat.

Then we decided to risk the post office. We didn't go there very often, cause we had to cross a hostile Chinese Tong block. But we were all curious about our folks since the recent blastouts.

Actually, we had a good time. After searching us carefully, one of the Tong guards took us to see a new batch of *fresh tofu* that was just ready. What a bunch of thieves, they wanted $35n.d. a kilo! But who can resist tofu? We bargained with them and got two kilos for sixty new dollars. And they even threw in a few limp cabbages. Tofu and cabbage, what a feast!

We had a little scruffle outside the post office with some dogs, but Annette and Carolyn are cracko shots, and got them before they got us. I think one of them was rabid. He kept stopping, every couple of minutes and his eyes would roll back and he would tremble and drool thick, ropy saliva. But that isn't always rabies. Sometimes it's only distemper.

"Show your S.S. cards," said the post-office matron.

They are *so* tightpuss. Even if we were being chased by guerillas *and* rabid dogs, they'd check our soc-sec passes. And the matron who gave me the body search had long, jagged fingernails. Lucky I didn't get an infection.

By the time I got home, it was late afternoon. The boys were still at block-school, where I usually taught. But Leon was there with *Katten* on his lap, purring and kneading with her claws. We found Katten a few years back. A half-grown, begraggled thing, nearly mauled by a dog pack. Somehow she had escaped to our block, mewing loudly until we found her. It's amazing how loud that critter can yell, especially when she smells steamed soy beans.

"No patients?" I asked Leon.

"Googles of patients, but I finished early for a change."

"Guess what I got today?"

"Steak?"

"Yeah, sure, at two old dollars a kilo. No, dummo, I got our mail!"

We poured through it snappo. There was a letter from his father in Oakland, and one from my mother in San Jose. There was a funny note from our friend, Victor, telling us he was still alive after the recent Boston bombings. There was a thin, mimeoed medical journal from the AMA. And there was a first-class letter, addressed to Leon from an unknown address in New Mexico!

"What's this?" I asked suspish.

We didn't know anybody in New Mexico, and despite security, there *was* always the chance of a minibomb. We felt the letter gingerly. It seemed OK, nothing hard. And we were curious. So we opened it.

"Dear Leon: Do you remember me

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from med school? We shared a cadaver at the anatomy lab. I'm writing to some old friends, trying to get one of you to leave the ratso urbs, and join us out here. We have a small clinic in the high mesa country of New Mexico, supported by the local mission. It's remote, beautiful, peaceful and interesting.

Our patients are mostly Indians, with lots of different tribes and local Spanish and Angloes. We have a trailer, an old but working x-ray machine, a few well-preserved drugs, and Navajo girl that I've trained as nurse and technician.

The catch is, no formal salary. But we live pretty good here. We can give you a house with land for a garden. Our patients pay cash or barter. That means we get fresh meat, mountain trout, produce and eggs. Plus enough cash for incidentals.

It's getting tough to run this place solo, and I thought you might consider a change. From what I hear about the urbs on my short-wave, it makes my hair frizz out!

If you're interested, let me know."

Rev. Luis King, M.D."

So of course, we decided to go.

II

DENVER, the rooftop of America, but oddly transformed. The shieks of the Kuwait Caliphate dominate this sky-high city, strip mining the Rocky Mountains for oil filled shale. Their presence is felt in the gleaming new tile minarets which dominate the skyline, calling the faithful to prayer, five times daily.

Their presence is felt in the latest fashions adopted by the women of Denver, who walk the streets with their bodies and heads heavily veiled in cheap-o synthetic scarves, with only their heavily made up eyes exposed to the nippy Rocky Mountain air. The bejeweled hand of the Kuwait Caliphate lies heavily on Denver, and the armed patrols ensure that it is a rather peaceful, orderly city. But there is also opposition. In a nondescript basement outside of downtown Denver, two blocks from the El Aman mosque, the Radical Jewish and Ecology Coalition meet to discuss strategy.

A young man with flying hair and wild eyes talks and gesticulates excitedly, "One of us can strap a bomb under his coat, see what I mean? And when Shiek Abdul comes out of his house, we can push through the crowd like we want to kiss his ringo, see what I mean? And then, when we're close, *pow!*"

A slight, older, craggy faced man draws tiredly on his pipe. "That's fine, Saul," he says, "but which one of us will strap the bomb to his own precious body?"

"We'll draw straws!" counters the younger man, promptly.

"Count me out," says the older man. "I have a wife and two small kids. I'm not looking to die."

"If you're that chicko, maybe we'll count you out completely!" snaps the younger man.

"Cool out, you two," cautions a heavyset blonde woman.

"What is this, a direct action group, or a debating society?" cries the young man, "How many are with me?"

A handful of the youngest men and women raise their hands, but they are obviously outnumbered.

"Look," says the older man, "If any of you want to go ahead with this, I won't stop you. But I'm not ready for that kind of risk."

"That's fine for you to say, Eli, but you know I don't have the techno-ed

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to do a really blasto bomb."

Eli took another puff on his pipe. "I'll help you with the bomb," he said, softly.

The younger man grinned and held up his thumbs in the characteristic gesture. "Thanks bunch-o Eli, I knew you'd come through. So let the young men die—so the old ones can live."

"Not just the old ones," countered a small, dark-haired woman who just entered the room. "If the land or the Jews are going to survive, let there be someone left to enjoy it."

The woman was carrying a pan of roasted soybeans and a pot of sage tea. Trailing behind her were two small, wise, dark-haired boys who climbed onto the lap of their pipe smoking father.

"Yeah, I know you're right, Ruthie," said the young man, "It's just that I get loco when I see what those bastards do here! They kicked old Sam Weiss out of the mines when they found out he was Jewish; and now the family is camping with relatives. And have you seen Aspen? It looks like a war zone. It'll take a thousand years for the earth to heal up!"

"I know, I know," sighed Ruthie. We do the best we can, but we also have to take care of ourselves. Calm down now, Saul. Have some soybeans and tea. You get so excited about things. I'll bet you haven't eaten all day."

III

LUCK-O we had an old station wagon locked in a garage. I'd never have the nerve to take pubtrans to New Mexico, with all the bombings and holdups.

We filled the battered wagon to the top with baggage. Then we filled her with more baggage. Then we piled some more baggage on top of that. There were all our personal belongings, food, water and a big drum of gasoline. I don't even want to think about the cost of that one. Enough gasoline to get us to Las Vegas, the first big settlement on our route, where we could (hopefully) get some more. There was Katten, yowling in her little carrying case, and there were us. Me, Sally, short, blonde and rather plump-o from too many soybeans. There was my husband Leon, tall, and thin. There was our oldest boy, Paul, a soulful, handsome nine year old. And there was Alex, age five, still soft and chubby and full of fantasy.

It was still too early in the spring for some of the Sierra passes to be open, so we took old State Route Five, down past Bakersfield. It was yucko! The road was nearly impassable, due to rocks and potholes. The central valley used to be the most productive agricultural area in the world. Now it is mostly dried patches of cracked mud. We passed small, isolated, well guarded clan-farms. After the food wars of the eighties, the large corps found it impossible to hold onto big tracts of open farm land. The guerrilla bands just overran the fields, as soon as the crops were ripe, and stripped them bare. The big companies sent goons, but the whole thing devolved into a costly, bloody mess. So the big agro-farms were abandoned, and squatters came and settled near the old irrigation ditches, built thick mud walls, inlaid with shards of broken glass, and began to work the land. It's a hard, dangerous life with constant fear of raids. But if the clans didn't take the risk, the rest of us would starve. Which is actually happening in some places, I heard.

We didn't dare enter any of the

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towns because they're all strong Chicano fortresses, open only to those with Spanish names.

We figured that if we took turns driving, we'd be in Las Vegas by morning. It's better to cross the desert at night, and besides, where would we sleep? As we left the last glow of the last town behind, we were amazed by the great, opaline half moon, neoning in the still, dry air. And the stars! I've never seen so many. Like dust motes or snow flakes or raindrops of light. I loved them that night, and I still do—even now.

We headed south and east, over high hills, low hills and great, flat empty places. After a while the moon set, and a lot of stars disappeared; I began to feel snoozo. The kids had long since grogged out in the jumble of the back seat, and even Katten had quieted down. I was driving and Leon had his head against the seat, snoring softly. It was very dark outside.

Maybe I started to doze, or somesuch, or maybe it was a mirage. But suddenly something black and *evil* jumped out of the darkness, straight at me! It wasn't guerrillas. It wasn't even *alive*. It was a hateful, horrible presence that engulfed me. I cried out and swerved the car. Luckily my reflexes shifted into overdrive, so I didn't run us off the road.

"Whazzit?" mumbled Leon.

"I don't know. I thought I saw something."

"Bandits?"

"I don't think so. It's gone now."

In the Orient, which I visited as a girl, the temples always have fierce demons to guard the entrance, so that the faint-hearted will not attempt to pass. I think the desert country is like that, too. I think the guardians were trying to warn us. Maybe we should have listened.

But we didn't. We decided we were both too dozo to drive, so we pulled into a little cotton-wood oasis that was hidden from the highway, and fell deeply asleep.

There was bright sunshine when we awoke in the morning. The cotton-woods stood beside a tiny, beautiful stream, and their fluffy branches were filled with a google of song birds. We stretched and yawned, and let the kids snap their legs while we fixed a yummo breakfast of soy grits.

How lovely it seemed, and how peaceful! We continued on our way, certain that everything would be OK.

IV

"OUR FATHER who art in heaven . . . The lord our God, the lord is one . . . Hail Mary, full of grace . . . Our father who art in heaven . . . Hail Mary, full of grace . . . "

It is a clear, brilliant dawn on the vastly vast mesa of Northern New Mexico. The birds are sending a mad cacaphony heavenward. But the ear of the deity is presumably focused on the quiet, droning chant of a human couple, kneeling with clasped hands and steaming breath, behind a large, dilapidated trailer. It is the Reverand Luis King M.D., and his assistant, Marie Redwing, saying their morning prayers. Does the deity really listen? Who can say?

"Our father who art in heaven . . . Hail Mary, full of grace . . . "

They hold their rosary beads between their clasped, chilled fingers, and continue their endless, droning chant which began with the first faint glimmers of light, and which will continue until the sun has fully brightened the sky. It is cold out here at dawn, at 7,000 feet. And an icy

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wind whips off the foothills of the rocky mountains. But Luis King tries not to cater to the demands of the flesh. And he has convinced Marie that she must also be strong.

Strong or weak? It is hard to tell with Marie. She is used to taking orders from white men holding cricifixes. As a girl, she was bright and showed much promise. So her family got together the small amount of cash needed to send her to the Mission School, where she could learn English and the white man's skills.

"You better do good," said her father, "or I'll whip you!"

"Talk English, or we'll whip you!" echoed the priests and nuns.

They wore black beetle robes and held shiny crucifixes. There was powerful medicine in those crosses, that was sure. How else did the angloes come to rule the entire mesa?

So Marie stammered and stuttered and learned the white man's speech. She even learned the white man's medicine, so she could go out and earn piles of cash—when cash was still plentiful. Her parents were pleased with her. But they died off in the food wars of the eighties. Was Marie strong or weak? It's hard to say. Mostly she didn't think about that. Mostly she thought about avoiding the powerful medicine of the crucifix and the whip.

She had mixed memories of the Mission School. Most of the nuns and priests were kind and sincere and filled with the love of Baby Jesus. But some were not. There was one fat math teacher/priest in particular. Whenever anybody slipped up and talked Navajo, his little eyes would gleam.

"Take off your clothes and get down on that floor!" he would yell.

Then he had all the other students take turns with the whip.

"Harder, *harder!*" he bellowed, watching and licking his lips, while the sweat poured down the folds of flesh around his neck. Marie had been the victim of that whip more than once, and she remembered its sting.

When she finally finished school as a certified med-tech, she got a job in this clinic, not far from her family grazing land. There she met Luis. He was loco, like the rest of his kind, but they were drawn together, irresistably.

"Hail Mary, full of grace . . . The lord our god, the lord is one . . . Our father who art in heaven . . . Hail Mary full of grace . . . "

Luis King chanted fervently, clutching his rosary beads between white fingers, trying to forget that his knees ached, that his limbs were tired and cold. It was so damn cold out here! So nice to crawl in bed with a cup of hot sage tea. To bed. Crawl back into bed and grab Marie's thick black hair and pull her down beside him. Bite her and slap her and lose himself inside her.

"Hail Mary, full of grace . . . The lord our god, the lord is one . . . "

He chanted faster, bitterly trying to forget the knees, the chill, the sudden throbbing in his blood. He *hated* it when his body took control over his mind! Sneaky, like the Medieval Succubi that slipped under the locked doorways of the monasteries and tormented the priests as they lay awake at night.

He had thought of becoming a Priest many times, himself. His rather grim Spanish mother and sentimental Irish father had certainly encouraged him in that direction. They had always taught him to regard his body as

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alien, dirty. They wanted to see him clean and pure in the eyes of the deity.

"The lord our god, the lord is one . . . "

Was the deity really listening? Who could say. But he *wasn't* clean and pure! Time and again the vows were made and broken. Made and broken, broken, broken. His flesh rose up again and again like the pimples that pocked his cheeks.

"Our father who art in heaven . . . "

Finally he decided to wallow in flesh. In shit and piss and pus and blood and vomit. His parents were pleased. Surely a son who is a doctor is next-best to a son in the priesthood. They were killed off in the food wars that hit New Mexico so hard in the late 80's. Maybe it was for the best. His motehr would have sneered, with her thin, tight lips, to see him mixed up with filtho squaw flesh.

"The lord our God, the Lord is one . . . "

He looked up. The sky was bright now, and the birds had settled into their normal daytime cheer. It was time to open up the clinic. He glanced over at Marie, and resisted the desire to grab at her hair.

"Come on," he said, "It's time to fix me some breakfast."

"It's so *cold* today!" she cried, stamping her feet. Then she smiled at him and tried to snuggle beside him for warmth.

He pushed her roughly aside. "Quit acting like a bitch in heat, or I'll beat the shit out of you!"

She gave a sad, puzzled shrug as she watched him clutch his crucifix and march angrily to the trailer clinic.

v

Las Vegas was plenty flippo. I knew it wouldn't be like before, when my folks took me there for holidays. But I couldn't imagine how it had changed.

It was hot by the time we got there. Very hot. Our radiator was hissing fiercely, the kids were whino, and Katten was howling like she'd never stop.

"Did you ever come here in the old days, Leon?"

"Sure."

"Remember the swimming pools?"

"Haven't seen one of those in an age."

"I wonder if they still have any?"

"I doubt it."

"If there was a place with a swimming pool, could we stay there?"

"It'd cost a ransome."

The place we stayed *did* have a swimming pool, but it had several large cracks. There was a little puddle of yucko rainwater at one end, that was filled with the sound of croaking frogs at night, and plenty mosquito larvae. The kids were puzzled by the big, kidney shaped crater in the ground, and finally decided it was an animal trap.

We were in the only hotel open in the whole town. The rest of them were all boarded up, or had their windows blasto, with sand and dirt drifting across the remnants of the plush casino carpets.

At least Las Vegas was still an open city. A place where strangers could stop and rest with a minimum of formalities. Their vigilante committee was strong, and kept things under tight control.

They examined our papers, searched us and the car, and even told us where to stay, and a place to buy gasoline, which was a great help.

The room was actually pretty comfo. Solid, old furniture, the holes in the mattress stuffed with clean

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rags, and thick newspapers nailed over the broken window panes. Even a thin trickle of rusty, running water. But it was hot. *Om*, it was hot! We took turns standing gratefully under the cool trickle of the shower, washing off the dust. Even Katten took her turn.

"What's that?" asked Alex, our youngest.

"That's a TV"

"What's it do?"

"It doesn't do anything," said Leon, "It's pow."

We decided to take a walk around the old grounds of the hotel. Some of the old palm trees and oleanders were growing wild, and gave welcome shade. Funny, we found the old casino still open. There were a handful of ratto men playing penny poker with a puffy blonde lady with a bored and vacant stare. In another corner we found a counter that still functioned as a little bar and cafe!

"Oooh Leon!" I clapped my hands and danced around the way I do when I'm wowed. "Can we eat in a *restaurant?*"

"It'll cost a ransome."

"Let's just ask."

It really wasn't too inflato. *Fresh* eggs. toast, marge and punch for the four of us came to $26n.d. So we opted for a treat. I hadn't tasted fresh eggs in ages!

They were a little disappointing, though, because several flies had landed in the plate and were swimming around the soft boiled eggs, trying to climb out.

"Yucko."

"It was *your* idea," glumphed Leon.

So I fished out the flies, and it was actually quite tasty. I *do* love fresh eggs.

We spent the rest of the afternoon hunting down the gasoline connection—an old Arab with a turban who controlled a banzeen pump, as they call it. The price was terrible, even after an hour of haggling. But at least we could continue our journey.

At sunset, we went down to listen to the frogs croaking in the swimming pool. Then we cooked up some soy grits and turned in. We wanted to be off to a rooster start while the morning was still cool.

Before we left, we glanced into the casino. The same ratto old men were still playing penny poker with the puffy, vacant blonde.

VI

THE MORNING AIR in Denver is grey and heavy. Not yet certain whether it wants to rain or snow. There is an impatient knock at the peeling basement door.

"Who's there?"

"Saul; let me in!"

Eli opens the door. He looks more tired and grey then usual, reflecting the leaden grey of the sky. Saul slips in and the door is quietly locked behind him.

"Is it ready yet? asks Saul, eagerly, like a child expecting a long promised toy.

"It's ready."

"Blasto! I need everything by noon. Sheik Abdul will be holding a reception for some big chopstick from China. There'll be lots of people milling around. I'm pretty sure I can get him. I've been checking the layout and schedules. I've made some friends at the palace, you know. They think I'm after favors. At noon, Abdul will come to the gates of the palace to welcome the chop suey, and there'll be crowds around to see the fun. When he comes out I'll slip through the guards, run up to the sheik, and

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Blasto! You know what I mean?"

"Are you sure you want to go through with this?" asked Eli. "No one will blame you for canceling the suicide. There are other ways."

"There's no other way to get Abdul! It's okay. I'm not scared at all. Someday, when it's all over, you can name a big park after me. Saul. You know what I mean? I'd rather die then live like this, don't you understand?"

"I understand."

"Are you coming to watch me?"

"Watch you?" cried Ruthie, Eli's small, dark wife who had slipped into the room to listen.

"Yeah, sure, I'd help if there was someone out there on my side."

"Not me," shuddered Ruthie, "my face would give you away for sure!"

"I'll come, if you want," said Eli.

"Don't take any chances, El," warned his wife, "don't stand too close or try to get him out of trouble. It's his show."

"I know, don't pull, Ruthie. He deserves to have someone there. I can take care of myself."

Saul fumbled with the small, homemade bomb and strapped it under his thin jacket. He went over to Ruthie and gave her a big hug and kiss. "Don't forget to name something after me."

"Are you sure you won't change your mind?"

"Sure."

"Chant a prayer before the bomb goes off. Saul, and be careful for bystanders." Ruthie kissed him and slipped out of the room.

"We shouldn't be seen together," said Eli, "we'll take separate trams."

Eli walked alone to the corner and waited. Poor Ruthie, she had been raised in such sheltered and comfortable surroundings. No one doubted that her life would be a pleasant series of dresses and parties. With her father's money and Eli's brains, all doors were open to her. But the world had changed a lot, and nothing in her past had ever prepared her for the life of a revolutionary. She was doing well, considering.

Eli boarded the tram-o.

"Show your soc sec card," said the conductor, a young, heavily accented Arab, whose job must have come from a well-connected cousin.

Wearily, Eli produced his card.

The Arab conductor looked at the S.S. card, then at the stoop-shouldered man.

"Jewish pig!" snapped the conductor, spitting at Eli's shoe.

Without changing expression, Eli paid his fare and returned the card to his pocket.

At the Sheik's palace, everything was a festive bustle. Tri-lingual banners in English, Arabic and Chinese flew about, welcoming the visitor. Quite a crowd was collected to see the show. Groups of oil-shale miners stood with permanently begrimed hands and faces, passing pipes of low grade hash-hish. In separate groups stood their wives, with heavy veils and darkly shadowed eyes, herding bundled children, eating fragrant hot popcorn in small paper cones, bought from street vendors.

It was ten minutes before noon. Eli stood at the edge of the crowd. Near the palace gates, he caught sight of Saul, rubbing his hands together nervously.

The crowd was growing more excited. The exotic Chinese procession, with its drums and gongs, was approaching and soon the gates would open, and Shiek Abdul would appear with his richly dressed personal guard. Eli felt a tight knot of anticipation in his stomach.

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Was it telepathy, or had Saul given himself away by too eager questioning of his palace "friends?"

At three minutes before noon, four turbaned soldiers slipped out of a small side gate and approached Saul. He saw them coming and tried to hide in the crowd, but they were too fast. In less then a minute, they had seized him, handcuffed him, searched him and found the bomb.

Whispers of surprise came from the crowd. This was a better show then they had expected!

Saul struggled, but it was no use. The four guards half dragged, half carried him into the palace. Suddenly he broke into a loud, hoarse shout.

"Don't worry, El, I won't talk! No matter what they do to me, I won't talk!"

"Idiot," growled Eli, under his breath.

Saul's shouts were silenced by a couple of hard punches on the mouth. Then he disappeared forever, behind the palace doors. The crowd gave a sensual sigh, and settled back to wait for the second feature.

After a reasonable length of time, Eli boarded the tram-o and trudged sadly back down the basement stairs.

"So how did it go?" asked Ruthie.

"I think we may have to leave Denver."

For the first time in a long while, Eli saw tears well up in her eyes and run down her smooth olive cheeks.

VII

Spring

DID YOU KNOW that some cactus have magnificent flowers? We hit the desert lowlands in early spring, in time to see the giant, spiny barrel cactus in full scarlet bloom. There were masses of delicate wildflowers among the tawney rocks. Mosaics of tender purples and yellow and banks of ivory trumpets veined with delicate pink. If you've never seen the desert country in bloom, then you've never really seen spring.

After Las Vegas, we continued on old Highway 66, which is kept in decent shape by the armed road co-ops. They charge a ransome to use the road, but at least it is usuable. Most of the towns along the way are under tribal control, and they seemed pretty peaco when we stopped for refueling—except when there's a blastout between the tribes. But Angloes were treated with distant detechment, and the trading of goods was conducted with a silent dignity that felt good after the haggling of the San Francisco Tongs.

About ten days after we left, we arrived at our destination. Coyote, New Mexico, population (as of the 1980 census, 16 years ago) five hundred. When we first saw it, we laughed. It was just like an old cowboy cino! Just a wide place on the dusty gravel highway. A few rundown adobe shacks and stores, and lots of ratto boarded up buildings. There was no one in sight at all. Just battered old buildings and the grey/green sage mesa stretching in every direction, as far as the eye could see.

Luis King had told us that the clinic was in an old trailer, just off the Highway. We drove around a bit, and finally saw it, surrounded by old cottonwood trees. There was a large wooden cross and a sign outside that said, *Indian Free Clinic. Pay What You Can.*

"It looks comfo," I said bravely. But inside, I dropped. True, we wanted to get away from the violence and tightpuss of the urbs—but *here?*"

There were some blank faced Indian fems, sitting outside the trailer,

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holding their babies. We stepped past them and went inside. We were greeted by a medicinal odor, a stampede of small children, and a harried looking Indian fem with a beautiful face and a patched, clean white uniform.

"Do you have an appointment card?" she asked sharply.

"No," said Leon, extending his hand. "I'm Doctor Kline, here to see Luis."

"You'll have to wait your turn. Any child is welcome in this clinic, but if you don't have an appointment, you'll have to wait."

"But we're not patients, we're here to work!"

She paused and studied him carefully. Then recognition neoned. "Oh, Doctor Kline!" she cried happily, "Luis will be so *glad* to see you—he's been expecting you every day for a week! Come on in. Today is pediatrics, and it's a madhouse."

She ushered us past the mobs of waiting children and their parents, into a shabby but clean doctor's office.

"I have a surprise for you, Luis," she beamed.

Dr. King was examining a small, brown child with serious black eyes. He put down the battered stethescope and gave some rapid instructions to the mother in an Indian tongue, then he ushered them out. He was small, balding and snappo. But running a solo clinic can make anyone snappo.

"Yes?"

Leon went up and clapped him on the shoulder, "Good *Om*, Luis, am I so old that you don't recognize me? It's Leon."

Dr. Luis King stared at him for a frozen minute. "You're five days late!" he sharped.

"Late?"

"In your last letter you promised to be here by May 1. It is now the fifth of May."

"Travel isn't exactly easy nowadays," said Leon.

"A letter of agreement is a formal, binding contract."

"Are you loco? We had to pack, drive across hostile territory, find gasoline and supplies!"

"That's a reason, but not an excuse," said Dr. King, razorly. "Now if you'll excuse me, I've got a busy clinic to run. Come back after four o'clock, when things have quieted down."

Needless to say, it was a pretty flippo afternoon. We drove all that way to be greeted like *this?* But when we returned at four o'clock, he greeted us with a big, friendly grin, just like we remembered him from medical school, and seemed perfectly OK. A little older, thinner, less hair and a lot more hyper and sharp, but basically OK. We figured it was overwork that made him blast.

"Leon," he cried, cheerio, "I'm so *glad* you've finally come! Was it a hard trip? The Highways are so gruncho now. We were worried about you! Sally, you are beautiful as ever, and these are your boys? Delightful. Have some sage tea, and I'll show you around."

The pretty Indian nurse came in with some hot tea and honey. *Honey!* I hadn't tasted that in years. I began to relax a little.

"This is MarieAnne Redwing," said Luis. "She assists me in every way."

"Just call me MaryAnne," said the woman, shyly. She was striking with a thick black braid and classic high cheekbones.

"I bet you'll *love* your new home!" said Luis, finishing his tea.

We did. It was a small adobe house

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just a short walk from the clinic. It was set well back from the highway and far away from other buildings. The rooms were tiny, but adequate, and said to be cool in summer and warm in winter. There was a well, a large area for a garden, and some cotton-woods for shade. But what really struck us was the view from the back.

Stretching behind the house, as faras we could see, was the mesa. Flat and grey/green with springtime, sweet smelling sage. There were a few horses and cows, grazing, and the ratto hulk of a rusted pickup truck. On the far horizon were some distant snowpeaked mountain ranges. But it was the mesa, the great, flat infinite mesa that held out eyes, covered over by the brilliant softo of the clear, blue sky.

VIII

"BUT WHERE will we go?" asked Ruthie.

"I don't know, maybe Santa Fe or Albuquerque."

"But what would we do there? We have no work, money, friends."

"And we also have no other choice," said Eli.

"We could wait and see. Maybe he won't say anything."

"He's weak and stupid. And they have ways to make people talk. They know he doesn't have the techno to make that bomb, and they'll be eager to find out who does. Once my name slips out of his loud mouth, we're finished, pow! I was loco to get trapped in his fantasy!"

"So many different types of people are drawn to a movement like this, that it gets hard to remember what's sensible or right."

"Thank you for not blaming me."

"What would be the use?"

"Maybe we can book passage on a cargo truck to Santafe. The Caliphate isn't powerful there."

"Those trucks are so awful!"

"We can't stay here."

"What will I tell the kids?"

"Tell them we're going visiting. And to keep their mouths shut. And only pack what the two of us can carry."

Ruthie nodded and frowned.

"I know you're furious at me," cried Eli.

"No, just at the situation."

"And you think *I'm* responsible for the situation!"

"Don't put words in my mouth."

"Sorry. I'm so confused. I feel guilty as hell for dragging us into this."

"I know, it's OK," said Ruthie, putting her arm around his shoulders. "A crisis was bound to come, eventually."

"It's *not* OK!" cried Eli in frustration. He looked up intently at his wife's face, waiting, almost hoping for some sign of anger or blame. Something he could lash out at, to relieve the intolerable guilt that gnawed his gut. But all his careful eye could see were the first irrevocable wrinkles and creases of worry and stress around her mouth and smooth forehead.

"I'll start to pack, and you go arrange the truck," said Ruthie."

IX

Summer

THEY SAY that different ethno groups, living nearby, tend to crowd each other's psychospace. That's as true in the desert as elsewhere. There's less people, but the groupings are neon clear. The biggest group is the Indians. Lots of different tribes are seen around here because the

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land is decent for sheep and small farms. The Navajos are the most common, followed by the Jicarillo Apache, some small pueblo bands, and even some plains Indians who have come south for the longer growing season. Most of them follow the N.A.C. That's the Native Amerindian Church, which administers the monthly peyote ritual at the full moon. A common religion gives them a sense of common ethno which prevents intertribal blastouts. But non-Indians are strictly excluded. The peyote is grown in small, carefully tended plots of sacred ground, according to ancient ceremonial pattens.

The other big groups are the Spanish. *Not* Mexicans or Chicanos. They are a very distinct people, descendants of the old conquistadores, according to the legend. They live on their old ranchoes and follow the teachings of the church, which administers the eucharist wafer at the time of the full moon. There is a small mission near here where the monks grow the ceremonial wheat according to ancient traditions. The mission provides the clinic with most of its supplies, and Luis and MarieAnne attend their monthly services faithfully.

The last group are the Angloes. That's us, and there are only a handful of English speaking stock on the mesa. A few farmers, and squatos and monks, and the postman and us.

But guess what? We loved it out here that first summer! Have you ever eaten fresh sheep meat cooked on an open fire? If you were born and raised in the urbs, you haven't! Delish! A very silent, pock-marked Apache Indian brought us our first sheep meat, in barter for treating his wife.

Apache fems have a spooko custom. When they get real mad at their husbands, for maybe balling out or something—they douse their long skirts with kerosine and set fire to themselves.!

It was flippo the first time we saw it, but this fem was young and strong, and only one leg was badly burned. Her man brought her late one night to the trailer, for emerg treatment. Then he and Leon squatted outside, where the barter is done. The man brought out a small piece of sheep, and Leon waited. Another small piece was produced, then another. That seemed OK, so we stood up, and he and his wife left, without saying a word. They really don't like to talk to Angloes.

Except for MarieAnne Redwing, Luis' assistant, and sweeto. She was very open and friendly to us. She took us to see the Navajoes doing their beautiful round paintings in colored sand, and arranged for us to attend the ceremonies and sings of the Healing Way. Often the Indians have ailments that the clinic can't cure, so they go to their own medicine men, usually with excellent results.

We saw a Sioux doctor, once, all wrapped in a blanket, tied with rawhide strips. He was singing and chanting out there on the vast mesa, in the center of a little firelit circle of chanting, drum-beating folk. Then, suddenly the medicine man began to cry and writhe and called out the name of the bado who was doing the witching. They grabbed the witch and blasted him right there. The sick man started to get better at once. Then the medicine man stood up and the rawhide fetters magically fell away. It was a spooko sight. We went right home for a stiff drink of local cherry wine. Luis never went to Indian ceremonies. They made him feel

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tight.

I really adored our little house. The adobe protected us from heat and cold. We had sweet well water and wood from the mountains for our stove. When the ground thawed I planted a garden of sunflowers, squash, soybeans, corn and peppers. Meat, fish, eggs, milk, wine and a little cash came as barter. As the summer sun grew high, I became brown and trim, from chopping wood and gardening. It was great to be away from the urbs.

The boys loved it too. They borrowed horses from our Spanish neighbors and rode freely into the cool, green foothills of the rockies, which were covered with aspen and spruce. Sometimes they brought home trout. They were growing lean and brown, too. In September I put them in the Mission School, which they liked well enough—for school.

Leon enjoyed his work. Challenging, but not too hard. Luis remained a mystery though. Sometimes he flew into blasto rages over nothing. Then, a few hours later, he was all smiles again. It was hard to take, and we wished we knew what was grunching him.

My harvest was excellent, and I was doing some canning for the winter—a technique learned from an antique Fanny Farmer Cookbook. I was also conducting reading classes for the local Indian fems.

At the autumn equinox, I stood on my back porch and watched a fantastico sunset of reds, lavenders and salmon tints. The winds were turning chilly now, and a screecho flock of magpies had taken temporary lease of our cotton-woods, where they could make divebomb raids on the last of my sunflower seeds. Katten was out on the mesa, playing at hunting. And the sage was an infinito of undulating grey. As I watched the great sky in the evening, as I watched the cloud shadows on the endless sage, it seemed as if the urbs had ceased to exist at all.

X

Autumn

BUT I WAS WRONG. The urbs and their problems were still very real and not easily forgotten. It was nearly Halloween. All of the adobes on the mesa had pumpkins and squash and long strings of red chilis on their sunniest walls to dry for the winter. The air was cold, but the continuing presence of the screecho magpies indicated that the snow was still a few weeks away. MarieAnne had taken our station wagon to Albuquerque to stock up on some medical supplies for the winter. Albuquerque was still an open city, under Pueblo control, and the University Medical Center was still operating at a reduced level. We let her have the wagon because it used less gas than the clinic pick-up. And there wasn't much need for a car in Coyote.

Luis King, in one of his calmer moods, was at our house for dinner. We had cleared the dishes and put the kids to bed. Tomorrow was a school day. I was mulling some sour cherry wine and Luis was fiddling with the knobs of his big short wave radio, our chief source of entertainment out here.

"*Extensive damage reported in many major urbs . . .*" said a voice, then lots of crackling static.

"What was that?" asked Leon who was building a fire.

"Just more guerrilla bull," said Luis, adjusting the knobs.

I guess it was inevitable. People have been talking about it for years,

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and there was really no way to stop it, once it began. From the mid-seventies on, there have been quantities of weapons-grade plutonium stockpiled in poorly guarded nuclear reactor stations throughout the world. As one little country after another acquired nuclear techno and materials and trained personnel, it was only a matter of time until some smart guerrillas joined the fun.

The great super-powers, Gog and Magog, were reduced to near helplessness by internal strife and the stranglehold of the Kuwait Caliphate. In the United States, the government was essentially destroyed by the ethno-guerrilla bands. In the U.S.S.R. and China, the various subjugated minorities were finally striking back—Georgians, Lithuanians, Tibetans, Formosans. Lilliput was hitting Gulliver and Gulliver was hurting bad. India and Africa had become a wasteland of famine and drought. In the middle-east, Armageddon seemed ready to blastout at any time—but somehow God always stayed the Philistine's hand.

But no God stayed the hand of the guerrillas. As each group and subgroup proclaimed their freedom and self-determination, the violence went inflato and inflato again.

We sat up all of that night, listening to the voices and the static on the radio. Somehow our minds couldn't absorb what was happening. Maybe it was the sour cherry wine. We drank cup after cup—what else was there to do?

No one was sure which group had started it, but the explosion was nation-wide as each group quickly followed suit. They must have all had small, crude nuclear bombs hidden in their ratto attics and cellars. And they were all waiting for the chance to blasto!

The Palestinians in Chicago, New York, Dallas and L.A. took the credit for touching it off. They issued a proclamation stating that, "No Jew-piggy shall survive while we are denied our ancestral homeland. And if the urbs must be destroyed to root them out, then it is the will of Allah!"

The other groups who had been sitting impatiently on their own homemade bombs retaliated in kind, either against their nearest enemy, against the Palestinians, or against the Jews who are always in the center of the cyclone of trouble.

Sides were taken, alliances quickly formed, unformed, reformed. Blastouts and manifestoes and hysterical static filled our little room, as we drank cherry wine and couldn't believe.

"In the Southwest, Phoenix, Tucson and Albuquerque have been badly hit. Armed Chicano groups are blasting the Indian-Free-Urbs. So far, Santa Fe, Denver and Flagstaff are quite."

Luis went white and dropped his cup of wine on the floor. "Albuquerque. That's where MarieAnne is!" he cried.

"And our wagon!" said Leon.

"I've got to go now," said Luis, abruptly.

"No, stay a little longer. It's nearly dawn," I said, "I want to hear the rest of this."

"You can keep the radio. I'm taking the pickup to go find her."

"Don't talk loco," said Leon, "You can't get the gas, and you couldn't find her. Everything will be total chaos there, and we can't be stranded here without the truck."

"Kline," said Luis, "there's something the matter with you. I felt it from the start, but I couldn't pinpoint it until now."

"Calm down, " said Leon.

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"The trouble with you," Luis continued, "is that you're a damn fucko Jew. The Jews *always* cause the trouble, whether they want to or not, ever since Adam and Eve. *That's* what's wrong with you. And it's *my* pickup. I'll do what I want!"

"But MaryAnne has *my* station wagon!" cried Leon, "and besides there's no gas. You couldn't find her and you're in no shape to drive."

Luis snapped shut the radio case and stood up. He was in one of those moods where no one could talk to him, and who could blame him, really? I was sick with fear, sick from cherry wine, and sick with worry that he'd leave us stranded. Yet part of me didn't believe that any of it was happening. It was all a well-done show.

"If you don't want to be left, then come along," said Luis.

"Are you flippo? I can't take the kids into a hellhole of radiation and fighting!"

"OK, Jew fucko," said Luis, "since there's no gas, I'll steal a horse. Or walk."

"Calm down and wait a day or two to see what happens, and let the blasting die down. If she can make it back, she will. If not, then we'll decide what to do."

Suddenly, without warning, Luis vomited out a huge quantity of dinner and sour cherry wine, and, still holding his radio, collapsed onto the yucko floor.

XI

Winter

THE MAGPIES felt it before I did. One afternoon in early October they left their cotton-wood perch in a great screecho flock and flew round and round the house a few times to say adios. Then they were gone. It was suddenly very quiet.

At 7,000 feet, the mesa would not get snow until around Thanksgiving. But the aspen- and pine-forested mountains were already covered with white, and a freezo cold wind whipped down their flanks.

It was getting much darker now, and hard to do all of my cooking and chores before the light was gone. Our stock of candles and wood were running dangerously low. Water still came from the well, but with the mountain springs frozen, it was scanty and kind of yucko—no longer pure. One of my chores was to boil it, but that cut even further into our wood supplies.

Food wasn't much of a problem, cause our supplies have always been local. But anything from the outside, from the urbs, simply flopped out. The post office had been especially hard hit by neo-wobbly groups. So that ended the mail.

There was very little news from outside. Whoever survived the blastout was busy trying to survive; to find food, safe shelter, and to heal their wounds and burns. The shortwave reported occasional outblasts of fighting, and there were occasional messages from survivors. *"Mr. John Dodo wishes to inform his family in Shitcreek Arizona that he is still alive, but injured. He will try to return home as soon as he can travel."*

These broadcasts came from the tightly controlled enclave of Santafe, which was untouched by the blastout and which was now under very tight army and vigilante control.

It was the shortwave that kept Luis alive. Like a ghost or hungry spirit, he moved himself and his radio into his office at the clinic. There he kept his ears pinned to the survivors reports. He rarely spoke or left the room. When locals or a trickle of sur-

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vivors came to him for medical treatment, he would ignore them, or blastout in rage, saying we were out of supplies.

This was true. But we still had to eat. So Leon did the best he could with whatever we had. We shared our barter with Luis. He mostly refused to eat, but we couldn't let him starve.

There were bad diseases showing up now. Lots of junko was getting into the streams and ground water. Everybody was trying to save their firewood for winter—no more gasoline to drive into the mountains for more supplies. So it was impossible to persuade the locals to boil their water. The Indians never really believed in germs anyway. So we saw lots of dehydrated babies with bad diarrhea. There were outblasts of encephalitis, rabies was spreading faster than usual. We were getting reports of typhoid and cholera further south. And plague, which is always seen occasionally in these parts, was rearing its ugly head with a vengence.

Most of our news came from survivors of the blastout. A handful came through Coyote each week, trying to get to Santafe. The old main highway was in terribly ratto condition, and plagued by tough guerrilla bands. So they were trying this route, up over the mountains. A longer, more gruncho trip, but slightly safer. Maybe. Some came on horseback, others on foot. There were a few cars with big tanks of gas strapped to the rear.

Luis always slipped out of his room to peer silently at the faces of these survivors. But none of the cars was our wagon. And none of these people had any word of MarieAnne Redwing.

A lot of them were sick, and a lot of them had bad burns or other wounds. Really yucko stuff. We didn't insist on barter. How could we? But one time, a family arrived in a little car whose tires had been torn to shreds by rubble. Leon treated their children with the last of the paragoric. And when they finally decided to abandon the car and continue on foot, they gave us the gasoline. We hid it in the house, so that we could drive into the hills for firewood—really it was a godsend. Our wood supply was nearly pow. And we did *not* tell Luis about it, not wanting to revive his flippo plan to drive to Albuquerque.

Towards the end of October, a dark haired family with two small children arrived on horseback. Their littlest one was very sick with a high fever, runny bowels and the pinched, limp look of dehydrated babies. He was too sick even to cry.

"I wish we could do more for you," said Leon, "but the medicine is all gone. This baby is all dried out. Let's see if we can get some fluid into him."

But before we could do anything, the little boy died, right there on the table. The olive skinned mother began to weep, silently. And the father, who looked terribly tired and stooped, seemed to shrivel another couple of inches.

Leon had some tranqs left, and he gave one to the mother and told them they could stop and rest for a while, to calm down.

"Thank you," said the father, "that's kind of you. We've been traveling for weeks for very little rest or food. We had to drink any water we could find."

"I'm sure that yucko water made him sick, Eli," murmured the woman to her husband.

"I'm sure you're right, Ruthie," he replied.

"You folks from Albuquerque?" asked Leon.

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"Denver."

"Denver! But that's under Caliphate control. It was barely touched in the blastout."

"I know. We had to leave for personal reasons."

"A little pleasure jaunt?"

"Not really."

"You're headed for Santafe?" I enquired.

"We're not sure."

"That's the safest place right now."

"Unless you're a Jew and the Caliphate is searching for you!" blurted the woman in a sudden gush of feeling.

"But we're Jewish too!" I cried.

"Thank god. Maybe we *can* rest a while," said the man.

"I would love to rest, Eli!" sobbed the woman, completely breaking down again.

So we took them home with us. What else could we do? They seemed so nice and so sad. Their older boy was named Michael, and he was just about our Alex's age. They all slept in our living room, ate our food, drank out water, helped with the chores. They were so grateful. How could we turn them away?

We figured we'd move them into one of the vacant houses as soon as spring came. They could lay low and do some farming until the Caliphate forgot about them, then they could continue onto Santefe.

They were outside one morning, grooming their horses and helping me stew some squash and deer meat on an open fire. The kids were fooling around—the mission school was pow since the blastout. I remarked how much better Eli and Ruthie were looking since they'd arrived. Plumper, younger—even allowing themselves some hopes for a new life.

Suddenly four horsemen in turbans came galloping into our yard, shouting in a foreign language and waving rifles. With an agility that surprised me, I scooped up the kids and fled into the house. But Eli and Ruthie just stood there, next to their horses, as though they were paralyzed.

"It is the will of Allah!" cried a rough male voice.

Then rifles cracked. Ruthie screamed and the rifles cracked again. Then the horsemen galloped away. And it was silent.

AND YET the life force is hard to repress. Around the middle of November, Katten came into heat. She wandered around the house, yowlo and screecho, waving her tail and thrusting her hindquarters into the air. Her cries echoed through the cosmic feline communications network, and brought a large battle-scared orange tom scratching at our window one chilly evening.

"He lookd Irish," I said to Leon.

"Oh, let him in. Anything to stop that damned howling. He's probably a good ratter."

Katten ran to him with joyous invitation and they lusted in the warmest part of the kitchen, under the watchful eyes of the children.

Three children now, for although our supplies were growing uncomfortably low, we had kept Eli and Ruthie's little son, Michael. Really, what else *could* we do?

And thus the life force was satisfied.

XII

BY THE MIDDLE of November, the temperatures really began to flop. It was well below freezing most of the day, and often below zero at night. Winter had settled in for good, and as Californians we really weren't pre-

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pared. Our clothes really weren't warm enough, so we were all cooped up together in the tiny house most of the time. I was getting pretty claustrophobic and depressed about our dwindling supplies. So far there was still no sign of snow, but barter had fallen off alarmingly.

I woke up one night, about 4 AM, with a painful, bito feeling on my hands, feet and nose. It was terribly, terribly cold, and our heater had finally stopped working because we had run entirely out of wood. Leon was already awake.

"What shall we do?"

"Let's wake up the kids and go over to the clinic. There's still heat there. Tomorrow we'll take the pickup into the mountains and chop some wood."

We jumped out of bed. *Om*, it was cold! Our breath steamed like kettles. We hurried into our warmest clothes and woke up the kids who were whiny and gruncho and generally reluctant to climb out of bed. We finally got them bundled up in coats, scarves, sweaters, whatever we could find.

Outside, there was a painfully dry wind, so cold that it made all our clothing seem like paper. A sliver of grinning opal moon was beginning to set behind the mountains. In its reflected glow, elongated wispo clouds fled across the sky, away from the cold, tearing wind. The rest of the sky was speckled with stars.

We hurried along as fast as we could, Leon and I each carrying one of the smaller boys.

"I want my mommy!" whimpered little Michael.

"Hush, you know she's pow. There's nothing we can do."

Suddenly we heard a low growling sound to our left. Then another and another. A dog pack.

Dear *om*, a dog pack!

Our guns were at home. Both of the little boys were crying, and clinging to us in terror. I was starting to feel shaky and faint. To be torn by a dog pack!

There were about six of them, medium sized and all different, but all terribly skinny and dirty and ratto, with god knows what diseases. They started to circle around us, and to move in closer with low, snarling sounds. I could see them clearly in the glow of that mocking, jeweled moon.

"Leon, do something, somebody, help!"

Suddenly out of the inko dark, another group of figures appeared. There were quick flashes of fire and the dogs retreated into the shadows. It was a small band of men. Indian guerrillas, I think, judging from the massive shadows of their cheekbones and noses, and the deep blackness of their hair. They were fully armed, but weren't wasting their precious bullets on dogs. Instead, they lit matches and threw them directly at the pack, frightening the animals away.

"Oh, thank you, thank you," I cried, "how can we ever thank you?"

One of them gave a short bark of a laugh and ripped crying Michael out of my arms and handed him over to Paul. Then he silently pushed me down on the hard, freezo ground. For a moment I was stunned, then I began to yell.

But they were on top of me and I couldn't fight them off. My pants were torn off and my inner, secret vulnerable self was found and entered and pounded and pounded and pounded.

Each time I thought they were finished, another one was on top of me, smelling strongly of sweat and

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booze, while the others held Leon off with a gun. There were only four of them, but it seemed to go on all night. Somewhere, toward the end of it all, I felt a muffled explosion of pleasure, deep inside. I cried out—I couldn't help it—and hoped Leon thought it was pain or fear. The dark figure on top of me laughed, then I felt him explode. Then he got up and they left, as silently as they had arrived.

I was shako, to say the least. My clothes were all torn, and there were sore, bruised places on my head, back and legs. My thighs felt so stiff I could barely walk. The kids, bless their hearts, were reduced to a state of shell-shocked silence. Leon helped me up and adjusted my ratto clothing.

"It's OK," I said, "better than rabies."

With his arm protectively around me, we managed the short walk to the clinic.

All of the lights were out and the door of the trailer was firmly locked. Leon and I rattled and banged until we finally heard Luis' sleepy, angry voice inside.

"No emergency calls after hours, and besides, we're out of supplies. Go away."

His voice sounded fuzzo and slurred, as though he might have been taking tranqs or cherry wine—or both.

"Luis, It's Leon and Sally and the kids. Our heater flopped out and it's freezo cold. Let us in!"

"Go away!"

"It's too cold in our house, Luis, there's no more wood. And Sally needs help. She's been attacked!"

Luis, face appeared at one of the windows. He was carrying his big crucifix and a rifle. "No emergencies afrer hours. This is private property. Pray to god to help you!"

The kids had come out of shock and were beginning to cry again.

"Let us in," I implored, "the children are cold!"

"It's after hours. Go away. Pray to god."

"Have you gone completely schiz?" demanded Leon, as angry as I've ever seen him, "Let us in, damn you, or we'll take the pickup truck!"

"Pray to god," slurred Luis, then his face disappeared from the window and he was gone.

This was more then I could handle in one night. I began to cry.

"I think we'd better take the truck and go," said Leon, slowly. "We can't cope with winter and that madman in there."

"But where?"

"To Santafe. There's food there, and medical supplies. It's peaceful, I'm sure they can use another doc."

"But we don't have the gas."

"We have that extra can at home, remember? And the pickup still has over a quarter of a tank. I think we can make it nearly there. We can walk a few miles at the end, if we have to.

"But the passes over the mountains are all blocked with snow."

"We'll swing around to the south then, I'm told that route is still passable."

"I'm cold," whimpered Alex.

"Come on," said Leon, "let's pack some stuff and get going. We can't stay here anymore."

We got in the truck, which was blissfully equipped with a heater. After a few minutes we got her started, despite the cold. I think I saw a face in the trailer window, as we drove off. But I'm not sure.

We quickly threw some basic food, water and clothing into the back of the pickup.

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"What about Katten?" grumbled Paul

"No room," said Leon.

"If she stays, so do I!" cried Paul, revealing his own adolescent tension in this childish behaviour.

"All right, we'll take her too," sighed Leon, too tired to argue.

As a brilliant sun rose that morning, we drove away from Coyote. We were glad to be done with the place, hoped never to see it again. An orderly, populated urb was what we craved now.

Micko, the orange tom cat, stood in the doorway of our house, waving his tail in farewell.

XIII

WE HEADED SOUTH, in the general direction of Albuquerque, but we would only go half way to that blasted-out urb. Then we would turn to the East, over some low ranges of hills that still weren't snowed in, and skirt back north, to the military sanctuary of Santafe.

By mid-morning we had reached the southernmost stretch of our journey, and were beginning to head east. The road was quite grunch, with lots of pot-holes and large cracks. But the pick-up was almost as good as a jeep. We passed some people on the road. Hitchoes, for whom we honestly had no room. Some pathetic looking family groups, for whom we *wished* we had room, and some suspish types that we wouldn't take even if we did have room. They all seemed to be heading away from Albuquerque, though I can't imagine that they were *all* walking to Santafe!

At mid-morning, we stopped to eat a simple breakfast and to add the rest of our gasoline to our nearly empty tank. The contents of the can brought our tank back over the ¼ mark. Not enough to get us all the way, but enough to get us close.

The road really started to flop out by noon. Big stretches of cracked rubble, and potholes that we sank into with a sickening lurch. This was low altitude desert country, but extremely cold and windy in the short December day, with engorged mackeral clouds scudding snappo across the sky. The desert sand drifted across the road and made it hard to see the pot holes.

We hit another hole with a loud thud, but this time we didn't climb back out. A large chunk of pavement had been washed out, leaving several yards of soft sand. We were stuck.

Leon cursed and tried to make the truck go forward, but we didn't move. We could hear the wheels spinning and digging deeper and deeper in.

Angrily, he switched off the ignition and got out to look. We were buried up to our axles. The kids, who had fallen asleep, woke up and began to cry.

"Be quiet!" I glumphed. But that only made them cry more.

I got out with Leon to take a look. "What'll we do?"

"We have to dig our way out. You start scooping sand from underneath the wheels, and I'll collect sage brush and rocks to build a temporary road."

It was a floppo, tedious job. I dug and dug, feeling the harsh, freezing sand scraping and tearing at my fingers. Leon and the boys collected debris which they carefully placed under the wheels to give us some traction. Only Katten remained inside the truck, yowlo.

In about an hour, we had built a presentable road. We had lunch, made the kids pee, then herded them back into the truck.

"Let's go!" cried Leon.

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I stayed outside to supervise. He started the engine, put the truck into low gear and slowly began to move the wheels. The truck went forward about half a foot, and then there was a loud grating sound as the spinning wheels ground into our carefully constructed roadway, scattering the carefully placed rocks and weeds, and digging back into the sand.

"What's going on?" called Leon.

I didn't have the heart to answer, so he got out. We both looked at the wheels, buried deeply again in the sand, then we sat down by the roadside, uncertain what to do.

We had been sitting there, depresspso, for nearly an hour when we heard a putt-putt-putting sound that rapidly became louder. It was an approaching vehicle. Maybe it was someone who could help us—or maybe it was more trouble.

We finally saw a solitary figure coming from the direction of Santafe on a small trail bike. He approached us and came to a careful stop. Slowly he climbed off his bike, and methodically removed his helmet, goggles and gloves.

"Howdy," he said.

"Howdy," said Leon, "we're stuck in the sand."

"I'll say you are!" he said.

"We'd appreciate any help you can offer," I said quickly, noticing the two large pistols in his belt.

"I'd be glad to help a pretty little lady like you," he bowed. He was short, stocky, balding man of late middle age, with a bushy beard and a ruddy complexion.

"Do you think you could pull us out with your bike?" asked Leon uncertainly.

"I can do better'n that!" he boasted, "I can show you a trick that'll get ya outa the sand any time. I been driving in the desert for sixty years, and I been stuck sixty times. I see you're suprised. I don't look near sixty. That's cause I live real clean, under the clear blue sky, here. Hell, I can tell you how to survive anywhere. I done it all."

"We'd sure appreciate your help," Leon repeated.

"You wanna know how to survive in th' desert?" he continued, obviously in no hurry, "I'll tell ya. The most important things are sun and water. If ya get too much of t'one or too little of t'other, you're gone. Gotta stay in the shade when th' sun is out. The air might be cold, but them rays is strong. They'll burn you up, dry you out. That's the worst, gettin' dried out in the desert. If there's no trees, just crawl under your truck. You folks shouldn't be sittin' right out in the open. That sun is a killer!

"At night, you look for water. Look for cactus, clumps of cottonwood, and dig around their roots. Them trees know where water is. If you're lucky, you'll tap a spring. If there ain't no trees, just dig a deep pit in the ground and line it with plastic. Enough dew will condense at night to keep you alive, barely.

"Food ain't no problem, there's plenty in th' desert. Birds, rats, lizards. Rattlers taste bettern' chicken! Cactus fruit in season, and tree mushrooms is always safe."

"Right now," I reminded him, "we're trying to get our truck out of the sand."

"Out of the sand? Why that's easy as pie. Just let some air outta them tires and roll 'er nice and easy."

I looked at Leon suspish. What if this old hide didn't know what he was talking about? Then we'd have no air! But we finally decided it was worth a try—what else could we do?

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"Let 'em down about half way," directed the old hide, "and they'll just squish on out."

Leon carefully let the air out of the tires and climbed into the cab, started the engine and stepped on the gas. After a couple of indecisive seconds, the truck began to roll forward, slowly and smooth.

We all cheered. The truck went forward a few yards, then with a thud, landed in another, deeper sandbank that lay just ahead. The wheels spun around and we were stuck again.

"You'll have to let more air out to get free of this one," guffawed the old hide.

"But pretty soon they'll be empty!"

"It don't much matter, cause you ain't going noplace, nohow."

"What do you mean?" asked Leon climbing out of the truck.

"Was you folks headed to Santafe?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Well you ain't gettin' there on this road," he said, "it's impassable for everythin' except bikers and hikers beyond this point."

"Then how can we get there?"

"You can go down through Albuquerque, if you don't mind all them A-rab bombs. Or you can wait till spring and go up over the mountains. Or you can get down on your little feet and walk."

"Well, thanks for your help," we told him.

"Glad to be of assistance any time m'm," he said, carefully putting back on his gloves, helmet and goggles and climbing back onto his bike and putt-putting down the road.

And so we decided to walk. We were a little less than halfway there—and we really had no other choice.

XIV

WE MADE a couple of packs out of our remaining food, water and warm clothes, and let Katten out of her carrying case. Hopefully she would follow or waddle behind us. Her tummo had become so distended with pregnancy that it nearly touched the ground! I hoped we'd make it to Santafe before the kittens were born.

We set out briskly, glad to be taking some action—any action. Besides, we'd known that we'd have to go part of the way on foot. There were still a few hours of daylight, but the air had turned extremely cold. The temperature must've dropped twenty degrees since we got stuck in the sand. There was a biting wind from the north and the clouds had thickened until the entire sky was the color of mud.

Then silently, without warning, the first snow of the year began to fall.

"What's that?" cried Alex, a native of California.

"That's snow, dum-dum," said Michael, the Colorado veteran.

"It looks like sugar," said Alex.

"It doesn't taste like it."

The two boys ran ahead, chattering happily and catching snowflakes on their tongues. Paul kept busy coaxing and helping Katten along.

"If the storm doesn't get too bad, it'll help the water problem," remarked Leon.

"And if it does get bad?"

We had covered a good distance when it finally began to get dark. We were lucky to find a sheltered spot under some scrub pine trees, where there was less snow and wind. We built a tiny brush fire, as a morale booster and heated up some grits, which tasted fantastico in the freezo air. Then, wrapped up in our warmest clothing, we all huddled together to get some warmth and sleep.

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It was cold. *Om*, it was so cold that I couldn't move without shivering. The boys were whimpering sleepily, and yet there was nothing we could do. My right foot had a bad blister from walking so far, so I removed my boot for a little while to ease the pain. I think we all managed a light doze for a while, at least I had a sense of elapsing time.

When I awoke, my hands, feet and nose, and my right, bootless foot felt completely numb. I tried to rub them, and then I became aware of what had awakened me. It was a soft yewing sound.

In the near total inko, it took a while to locate Katten, half buried in a tangle of arms, legs and coats. But I finally found her, mewing softly in a puddle of half frozen blood, and busily licking something small and wet. It was the first of her kittens. It was dead.

Leon and Paul were also awake, while the small boys slept deep. Over the next hour or so, we watched Katten give birth to another four kittens. Three of them were dead, but two of them were still alive, going screecho for milk and stretching out their tiny claws. They were about the size of small rats, and both orange tigers like their father, according to a quick flick of our flashlight. After Katten had finished birthing, she ate up the afterbirth and part of one of the kittens. Then, one by one, she carried her two wet, screecho babies into the warmest spot she could find—Paul's coat.

"She knows who her best friend is," said Paul, proudly, "hey, that tickles!"

Leon and I threw the remains of the dead kittens into the bushes and tried to clean up some of the bloody mess. Paul reported that Katten had finished grooming them, and they had all settled down for a good nurse.

We tried to catch another doze before dawn, but it was just too damn cold. Also, although I had regained feeling in my hands and nose, my right foot was still quite numb, and rather swollen. I tried to rub some life back into it, but no luck. So, with some difficulty, I tugged my boot back on, and tried to forget about it.

The temperature was still dropping. Probably well below zero now. The hairs inside my nostrils were frozen and brittle and it hurt to breathe. The wind was whining and the snow fell thicker and faster through our flimsy shelter of scrub pine.

I tried again to massage my foot through the leather boot. It remained a swollen, numb object, as though it belonged to someone else. I was getting worried, but didn't want to frighten Leon by saying anything.

Storms like this one don't hit often, I'm told, but when they come, they're bad.

The Buddhists describe different kinds of cold hell. There is Great Cold Hell, Cold Screaming Hell, and Great Cold Screaming Hell. I think that night was spent in Great Cold Screaming Hell.

Dawn finally came, only to reveal a roadbed that was entirely buried in deep drifts of brittle snow. I started to cry.

"We'd better get back to the truck," said Leon, "at least it's warmer there."

"I'm not sure I can walk!" I sobbed.

Actually, I could limp with some difficulty. My foot was now a throbbing, leaden lump, that I dragged along. And so swollen that I couldn't remove my boot.

It was a death march. My foot was unbearably painful. The little boys were hysterical with hunger and cold.

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Paul managed to keep the two kittens under his coat, while Katten followed behind, suddenly lean and screecho. Leon, quiet and shocked struggled along with our food and water. I really didn't think we'd make it.

We got to the truck around noon. The snow and wind had stopped and there was a glaring cold sun in the icy blue sky. The temperature was still very low, and the snow a cruncho, treacherous frosting.

I crawled into the cab of the truck, sobbing. Leon crawled in after me and cut off my boot with his knife. The foot looked blueish and doughy, and was devoid of all sensation except a dull, throbbing pain. Leon's face looked haggard and worried. He had suddenly aged a great deal.

Paul reported that one of the kittens had died on the way. We threw it outside. Katten was busily nursing the last one on the floor of the truck.

We were a little warmer inside. Leon started the engine and ran the heater for a few minutes. Blissful warmth. We ate some food and then sat and rested and waited—for what?? For our food to give out, for spring to arrive, for the Messiah to come?

In the late afternoon a solitary Indian came by on horseback. He rode up to our pick-up and peered in the window. We were almost too frightened to speak, after our last Indian encounter, but we had no other choice.

"Please," said Leon dully, "we need some help."

From his clothing we could tell that he was a Jicarillo Apache, a notoriously fierce group. Maybe he would rob us, even kill us, but we were too exhausted to resist.

But when we rolled down the window, the large, pock-marked Indian broke into a big grin, "Hey," he said, "ain't you the Doc, over in Coyote? You remember me? I once brought my wife with a burned leg. You fixed it for some sheep meat!"

Leon smiled back, weakly.

"Where you going?" demanded the Indian, "you shouldn't be out in this storm."

"We were trying to get to Santafe," said Leon. "We thought we'd be safer there, but we got stuck in the sand and snow. Can you get us out of here? My wife's foot is very sick."

The Indian guffawed, "Sure I'll help you—have you got some sheep meat for trade? That's OK, only kidding, sometime you give me free medicine, OK?"

Leon nodded.

"But listen, man, I can only take one of you. I'll take your wife first, cause she's the sick one. I'll bring back some friends to get the rest of you later OK?"

Leon and I looked at each other, frightened. This was no time to be separated! But we had no other choice.

"And listen, man I can't take you to no fucko Santafe, they shoot Indians on sight! You know that. But it's OK, I'm heading back north. I'll get you home—to Coyote."

XV

I PASSED OUT for a while, from pain and exhaustion. When I awoke, it was nearly dark. My Apache benefactor, Joseph, got off the horse and led us to a small rundown wooden shack, perched on a solitary rise in the mesa.

"Where are we?"

"It's too late to travel any more. It's getting dark. We'll spend the night here. There's gonna be a sing. It'll do your foot some good."

I could no longer walk. My right foot just wouldn't support my weight

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any longer. Joseph picked me up and carried me like a sack of flour. Past the horses that were tethered outside, with steaming breath, into the small, warm, smoky cabin. There were a number of other people there, squatting on the dirt floor, around a franklin stove. Most were Navajoes, judging from their dress, with a few Apache and other tribes.

They all looked at us curiously. Joseph spoke to them quietly, in Indian tongue, and gestured to my leg. They all nodded gravely. An old, white haired Indian man, with a lined bronze face came up and ceremoniously welcomed me.

"He's the road man," said Joseph. "He'll lead the sing. It's almost sunset. There's a full moon tonight. Time to start."

I realized that I had somehow been included in the monthly Native Amerindian ceremony, which few Angloes had ever witnessed. If I could walk, and if Leon were there, I would have been wowed. But as it was, I barely noticed.

We all sat down in a circle, around the stove. My foot was now a throbbing, flaming weight. The road man and his assistant, whom Joseph called the fire man, built the fire up high, and then they began to pass around a little cracked dish, containing a pile of small, dried, leathery objects.

Peyote. It was the full moon peyote sing. I passed the dish on. I was in no mood for novelties.

"Eat three," the road man ordered, "it'll make you feel good."

So, hoping the drug might have a pain-killing effect, like alchohol, I began to nibble on a peyote bud, appaled by the bitter nauseating taste. Somehow I managed to eat the required three.

Then a pot of peyote and sage tea was passed around the circle. But the sage couldn't hide the repulsive peyote taste. I gagged.

"Vomit if you want to," said Joseph. Your body wants to get rid of evil. "It's OK. Everything is OK."

But nothing would come up. I kept hoping this would numb me like wine, but no such luck. I became more and more nauseated, until suddenly the nausea passed, and my mind became very clear. I felt a great, an overwhelming sense of sadness and loss. My foot wasn't going to make it. I knew that now. No more foot. Foot pow. I cried deeply and soundlessly for my lost foot. And for Leon and the kids and Katten and her baby, and MarieAnne Redwing. Would I ever see any of them again? I cried for my foot. I cried for them all. I cried.

The Indians were beginning a low chanting now, and a staff with snake rattles, beads and feathers, and also a large drum were being passed around the circle. Whoever held the staff led the chanting, rhythmic and low, accompanied by the steady heartbeat of the drum.

I cried.

The peyote tea was passed around again.

"I don't want it," I choked, "I've had enough."

"You're in the canyon now," said the road man. "Drink more and you will gather strength for the peaks."

He put the cup to my lips, so I drank. And I cried. The chanting continued for a long time. Suddenly, in the darkest part of the night, after all the lights had been extinguished, my mind cleared of all thoughts. My sorrow was oddly gone and a magnifico rainbow appeared, glowing before my eyes. I smiled slightly in surprise, and

(cont. on page 130)

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LIFE has a place for You

EVERY HUMAN being has a mission to fulfill in the universal scheme. For each person there is a place in life which will fit him like a glove—make him happy and at peace with the world. You as a part in the giant jigsaw puzzle of the Infinite, have a perfect fit, somewhere.

It is inconceivable that the vast, orderly universal Intelligence we observe about us could exist without purpose or direction in every detail. The key to finding your place in this order lies within man's own subconscious mind. Many men, in an entire lifetime, experience only a small portion of what they could really have achieved had they known the secret of tapping their own mental reserve.

TOMORROW IS YOURS

Find your place in life! Let the *Rosicrucians*, an age-old, world-wide fraternity of progressive men and women, show you how. Their knowledge is the ageless science of life—it has been used for centuries to direct the world's thinkers and doers to their proper niche in the universal plan. Write today for your free copy of *The Mastery of Life*. It will explain who and what the Rosicrucians are and, moreover, how they can help you make tomorrow as you want it. Address: Scribe O.Z.V.

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DEATH ETERNAL

Mankind has feared and resented Death for all our history, but recent researches have begun to give us real evidence of life beyond death—Life Beyond Life—which makes the question of our ages-long pursuit of immortality more crucial than ever . . .

RAYMOND F. JONES

Illustrated by RICHARD OLSEN

OCTOBER is the month of death. Brown leaves pile high in the gutters. Trees stand naked in the cold fall rains. Jim Nearing hated it. He slowed his car as he came in sight of the monstrous Gothic mass of Trinity Chapel. Here, he thought, a man should be able to learn all about death.

In front of the Parish House was a small white sign: Reverend Aaron Marton, Pastor. The house itself was gray gingerbread and weathered brick. Jim opened the car door and ran through the rain to the porch. Shaking his coat, he pressed the button and heard a faint, pleasant sound of chimes inside.

Almost immediately, the door was opened by a girl who had a fair, oval face and a tumble of jet-black hair that reached her shoulders. She smiled pleasantly. "Will you come in?"

"I'd like to see Dr. Marton," Jim Nearing said hesitantly. "I don't have an appointment—"

"That's quite all right. Please come in. I'm Sheila Marton, his daughter."

He stepped past her into the dim hallway and let her take his hat and coat. "I'm sure my father will see you. May I have your name?"

"James Nearing—your father and I have never met before."

She smiled again and turned away to the other part of the house. You must be as Irish as your name, Jim thought, with that face and that black hair.

He was kept waiting only a moment. Then Dr. Marton appeared. The minister was a tall, massive, white-haired Irishman who must have been old when Sheila was born. He extended a vigorous hand. "Please come into my study and have a seat, Mr. Nearing."

Sheila glanced at Jim out of the corner of her eye as he moved past her. The youngest of an enormous brood, Jim decided. Her mother was dead and she saw it her Christian duty to be housekeeper and hostess in her father's house until he also was gone. But by then Sheila, with the black hair and the fair Irish skin, would be a middle-aged spinster.

She closed the door and Jim was led to a seat beside the big desk of Dr. Marton. "I don't believe I've had the pleasure of seeing you in our congregation," said the minister.

"I'm not a member," said Jim.

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"I see. Then if there is anything I can do to help you—"

"Dr. Marton—you are looking at a dead man."

The minister's face betrayed no surprise. The faint inclination of his head invited Jim to continue.

"Six months at the outside," said Jim. "That's the best my medical friends give me. Cancer."

The minister's bushy eyebrows raised as he looked into Jim's face. "And so you fear what the coming months are to bring you," he said.

"I'd be a fool if I said I didn't. But I'm not here to ask for personal comfort because I'm dying."

Dr. Marton's face softened. "There is no shame in one human being's asking comfort of another."

"But there is one other thing worth a great deal more—knowledge."

"There is so little of that—"

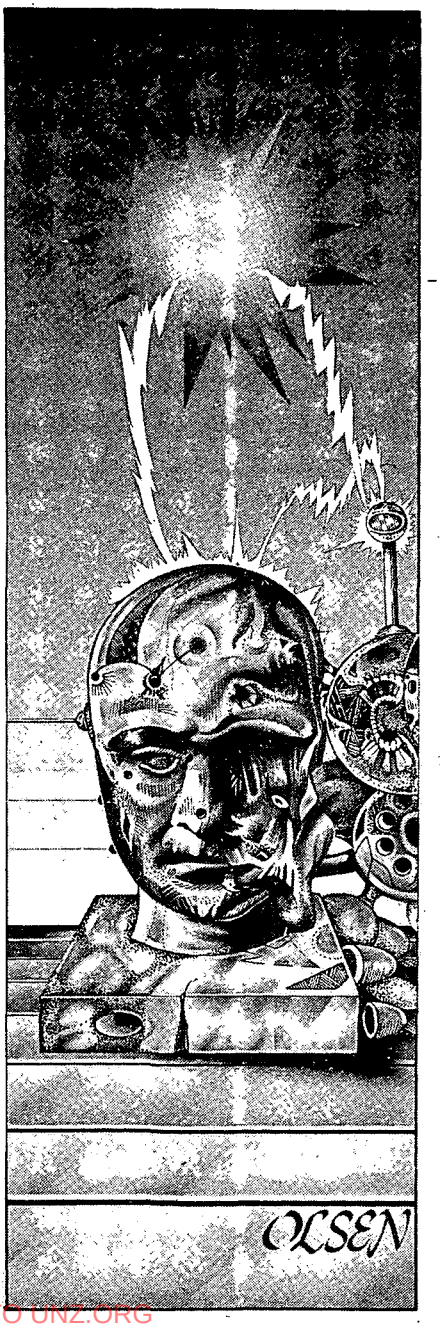
"I am a scientist, Dr. Marton. I am Dr. Nearing. Professor of Biophysics at the University. I am aware of the inadequacies of our general knowledge about Man and the Universe, but we have to function with the best information available. To obtain information and knowledge we consult the recognized specialists and experts. That is why I have come to you."

Dr. Marton smiled and shook his head. "The parallel between our professions is more than a little strained, Dr. Nearing. What do you wish me to tell you?"

"Tell me about the soul. What is known about it?"

"You are a human soul. Your experience is as great as mine. I can tell you nothing that you do not already know."

"I don't want that kind of answer," said Jim. "I don't even know if the human soul exists. I am aware of functions and aspirations that are not



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explained on a physiological basis. But I am aware of nothing more. I want to know what there will be of Jim Nearing a year from now."

"How can anyone tell you more of yourself than you already know?"

"The world is full of people who claim to be able to do just that."

Dr. Marton shook his head again. "I know of no one in my profession who would be so bold. Our only claim is some small ability, due to the common humanity that is in all of us, to help searchers like yourself in finding answers—but never providing those answers ready-made."

Jim smiled as if in bitter memory. "I am afraid you are not acquainted with the assertions of some of your fellows.

"But I should not have told you about myself. My own death is not actually a major element of the problem. I am concerned with death as a phenomenon of existence—as the final stamp of futility on our whole race.

"Why did Archimedes die? Why Galileo, Newton, Faraday? And, finally, why must James Nearing die? A man spends a lifetime shaping and perfecting a mechanism—his own mind—and then the whole structure is wiped out, and a new, blank mechanism set up to begin the whole futile cycle once more."

"One generation builds upon the foundations established by the former ones," said Dr. Marton.

"But how small is this advantage in comparison with the possibilities if the *same* mind could continue its work! No mind of genius has ever been permitted to pyramid its own abilities over a period of generations. Had this been possible we would have reached the stars before Christ was born!

"This is the problem I must have answered." Jim continued. "That I am to die soon has no bearing except that I, personally, have only a very limited time in which to solve it."

"Your desire is as old as Mankind," said the minister kindly. "Quite surely, the first man also desired to live forever."

"That makes it no less valid!"

"No, but it does emphasize the magnitude of the problem—if all the generations of men have sought and failed to find an answer.

"You leave me at a loss, Dr. Nearing. If you asked for solace for yourself I like to think I could say something you would value. But to generalize the problem as you do, however, confuses me with the desire to help you, and with the necessity of saying I have no sympathy for the age-old problem that concerns you.

"I have seen many men die, I, myself, have little time left. Perhaps even less than you. But I have no desire to combat the inevitable. All of us are the products of a Superior Being, and if His design includes the transition we call death there is no purpose in trying to frustrate that design."

"There is no man who does not sense the ultimate tragedy that is death! But because it is inevitable we clothe it with poetry!" Jim leaned closer to the minister, his face intense. "What shred of evidence do we have that death is not the ultimate of all possible misfortunes, greater than any disease, accident, catastrophe you can name? But men have fought these other evils since the beginning of time. Why should we be denied the right to fight death, as well!"

"In the laboratory," said Dr. Marton slowly, "you take great precations to make certain the questions you ask of the Universe are meaningful ones. The same requirements hold true

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with respect to the spirit and soul of man. It is common here to ask meaningless queries, and neither God nor the Universe are obliged to answer such."

"Have I asked a meaningless question?" Jim demanded.

"I'm afraid you have. It is the question that has been echoed throughout time: Why? And its very meaninglessness is attested by the inherent faith in men that life and death are as they should be."

"Faith—!"

"I did not think you would like that word, Dr. Nearing, but it is a term which is technically necessary here. As much so as the terms, electron, neutron, and cell are necessary in your field.

"You can set up an electromagnetic field in the laboratory, but it produces no electricity as long as it is motionless and dormant. It's very existence is undetectable unless it goes into action. It is not a bad analogy to say that the human soul has similar characteristics. Dormant, you cannot detect its existence. In action, it produces a flow of faith which is the energizing force behind all things spiritual, behind the dreams and imaginations of men. It testifies to the existence of the human soul."

"You and I do not speak the same language," said Jim.

"Wait—let me finish—" said Dr. Marton gently. "Although I do not speak it, I believe I understand your language quite well. I understand what you have come for, Dr. Nearing. Much more than you would believe—

"You want me to give you evidence that the soul of man is something you can detect with a meter. You want me to give you some hint as to how it might be trapped in a container and measured.

"Your ambition is doomed. As well try to cage a ray of light. I understand your language—but is wholly inapplicable to the problem!"

Jim straightened in the chair, his face softer now. "I expected no more," he said. "But I couldn't overlook the remote possibility you could be of help. Your vision of the Universe may be the more real. But I can deal only with what my senses and instruments record."

Dr. Marton came around the desk as Jim rose. "What are you going to do?"

Jim smiled in wry apology. "I'm going to try to cage and weigh a human soul!"

"The vision of Faust!" said Dr. Marton intensely. "Give it up!"

"It's been my life's ambition. And now—my life is almost spent."

"I hope the coming weeks may produce a change of heart in you," said Dr. Marton. "But please do not let this be our last visit. You are no different than other men. Your need of reassurance is as great as anyone's. I would be grateful for the privilege of your friendship."

"Thanks," said Jim. "I shall try to see you again—if there is time."

SHEILA SAW HIM to the door. She took his hand and he felt the warmth of her fingers. "We'll see you Sunday, perhaps?"

He shook his head. "I'm afraid not, Miss Marton. Later, perhaps—"

In the car, he cupped his right palm and felt still the impression of Sheila's warm hand. It was the only part of him that felt alive.

He certainly should not see *her* again! he thought. Angered by his own yearnings, he glanced at his watch and put the car in motion. He was late now for his appointment at

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the hospital.

THE GRAY CONCRETE pile of Memorial General Hospital was as oppressive as Trinity Chapel. Both were monuments to death.

Jim parked in the area reserved for the University staff and hurried to the surgical wing. There, he found his friend, Dr. Thorsen, getting ready for an operation.

"I thought you weren't going to show up," said Dr. Thorsen. "We couldn't wait any longer."

"I got held up on the other side of town. Did you check the placement of the detector under the operating table?"

The surgeon nodded soberly as he dressed. "I hope you understand, Jim, that I'm not in sympathy with what you're doing. There's the recorder on the desk. Take it and beat it, now. I've got to hurry."

Jim took the small leather case, which he had checked the night before with the detector in the operating room. He went toward the theater overlooking the surgery. As he passed the tiny surgical waiting room he saw a young man slumped on the red leather cushions, eyes closed.

Jim knew him. Dale, the husband of the woman about to be operated on. Within the hour, he was going to learn about death, too. There was no chance at all that his wife would survive. The operation was only a last ditch chance that had to be taken.

In the theater, Jim sat down with incredible weariness suddenly falling over him. The illness, he thought. His weight had already begun to drop. Sometimes he felt the twinges of beginning pain that would soon become unbearable.

He opened the case and took out the delicate instrument. He flipped the switch and checked the action of the needle. Everything was in readiness.

For a woman to die.

Her shaven head was exposed. Over her face the anesthetist was placing the mask. Frank Thorsen was approaching, being helped into his sterile gloves. There was nothing right about the whole thing. Four children and a man would be left empty and alone. And there was nothing anyone could do about it. What place was there for faith at this time?

He watched in a lethargy of body and mind as Thorsen cut back the scalp flesh and applied the little motorized saws. He gripped the instrument in his lap. With its help he hoped to determine for himself the existence of something that men of all ages had termed a "soul". It was curious, he thought, that Dr. Marton had likened the soul to an electromagnetic field. All Jim's evidence so far accumulated indicated that as an active, detectable field, the soul existed only at the instant of death. In life, it lay dormant to all means he had devised for detecting it. Now, for the first time, he hoped to see it in action at the moment of death of a human being.

If his hypotheses were right, the detector beneath the table would transmit to the indicator the faint transformation of the field as life went out of the women.

The theater's sound system was turned off so he heard no sounds from the chamber below, but suddenly he caught the stiffening tension in the men and women. He saw Thorsen glance up quickly to his assistant and to the anesthetist. A thick mass had been removed from the brain cavity, and now the surgeon probed down with quick, steady fin-

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gers.

But Jim was no longer watching the scene. His eyes were upon the face of the meter. In a long, slow arc, the needle was rising. As if a sweep of chill air had brushed his face, Jim felt a throbbing, penetrating cold.

The needle reached the peg and bounced gently. Then, as slowly and deliberately as before, it dropped back. It bounced a little once more as it touched zero, and then was still.

Jim sat there in mere half awareness. His thoughts swept over the ages of man's history in which faith had sustained the race through hopelessness and futility. Faith in the immortal soul of man. Faith based on no more than a hope, a dream, an intuition.

Now that faith could be upheld. He had proven, with the very instruments which were scorned by the pious, that their faith was valid.

He found his way down the stairs, clutching the instrument case in his arm. Thorsen was there, just inside the waiting room door, young Dale beside him. The dead woman's husband was not crying; that would come later. But Jim was fascinated by the expression on his face.

There was no bitterness, Dale said slowly. "It must have been His will. We'll get along, if He needed her more than we do. She'll be close to us. Maybe she can do more to guide and help the kids now than before. Don't worry about us, Doctor. I know you did the best you could."

He went out past Jim. The two men watched him go.

"He'll make it," said Thorsen. "He'd got something inside that'll carry him through."

Jim nodded, staring at the corner around which Dale had disappeared. "And so have I," he said. He held up the instrument.

Thorsen's eyes widened. "It worked—?"

"Yes. They're right. The ones who've believed have always been right. But I wonder how they knew—when the rest of us didn't."

"What are you going to do now?"

"I'm going to capture a human soul, communicate with it, put it in a position to be active once more in the world it has left. I've got enough data now to show me how it can be done."

"Randolph—?"

Jim nodded. "Yes. The warden has agreed to let me in. I gave him a lot of double talk about biological science needing the knowledge Randolph was willing to supply. But I told Randolph the truth. He doesn't believe—and doesn't care much one way or the other. But he's agreed to cooperate."

THE SCHEDULED execution of Harry Randolph was two weeks away. Jim expected it would take every available hour of that time to finish work on the receptor-effector mechanism he had begun.

It filled the entire top floor laboratory of the two-story house he had bought near the University. Returning from the hospital, he climbed the stairs and exchanged his coat for a work smock. He walked along the aisles formed by the masses of equipment and touched the cold surfaces of rubber and metal and plastic.

This was what he hoped to substitute for a human body. And perhaps it was not such a poor substitute! It was repairable, functionally eternal, there would be no death again. But the human body was a mere fragile pulp that could hardly endure a century of use before it had to be discarded.

The only drawback was that his

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mechanical and electronic substitutes would experience nothing of the sweet poetry that vulnerable flesh could know. He forced out of his mind the sudden, unbidden thought of dark-haired Sheila Marton.

A month ago he had contacted the warden of the state prison and Harry Randolph, convicted of murder. Randolph was a young doctor who had fought and killed his wife's seducer. The state said Randolph had no right to so protect his home. He had to die.

For Randolph's sake almost as much as his own, Jim hoped his experiment would be successful. Apathetic, Randolph had listened to the fantastic scheme and agreed, but he had no longer any real desire to save himself.

Jim believed he could now complete the small transmitter which would be taped to the condemned man's body, and that this would transmit his life field to the laboratory. Here it would be held by an opposing field inside the spherical copper cage in the center of the room. And with the aid of the surrounding equipment the intelligence of the field could communicate and act upon the tangible world.

Such was Jim's hope of personal conquest of death.

IT WAS a Saturday night when he began revision of his equipment in accord with the new data obtained at the hospital. Two weeks of unceasing work brought him to another Saturday, the day on which Harry Randolph was to die.

In the late afternoon Jim finished the final run of tests. He removed the belt of miniature equipment from the body of the twentieth rabbit he had killed. From each of these he had transmitted successfully the field representing the animal's life. At least his instruments had said it had been conveyed to the copper cage. The final, positive proof would occur only when he had a human being with which to work.

He glanced at his image in a small instrument mirror as he boxed the transmitter to take to the prison. Thick beard covered his face. His eyes were hollow and dark.

As he shut off the power, he heard the sound of the doorbell below. He let it go for three more rings. Then, in anger, he descended the stairs, prepared to send off whoever it might be.

It was Sheila Marton.

She looked at him in a moment's astonishment and took a backward step. "Dr. Nearing—"

"I've neglected my social appearance lately, Miss Marton. I can't ask you in. I have an urgent appointment."

"I just stopped by to say hello," said Sheila Marton, "and to ask if perhaps you had found time to accept the invitation of two weeks ago."

"Invitation—?"

"To visit the service at Trinity Chapel. We looked for you the last two Sundays. Father asked me to stop by."

Jim looked at her silently, trying to fix an unfading image of her loveliness in his mind. She was wrapped in the folds of a fluffy gray coat and wore no hat. Her black eyes looked at him inquiringly.

"You still want me to give up—" he said, half to himself.

"Give up?" Sheila's face became puzzled. "I don't understand."

He shifted in sudden decision. "If you have time, I'd like to show you something. Come with me to my ap-

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pointment. If you will accept my invitation. I will accept yours."

Sheila hesitated only a moment. "I'll be glad to. I'll have to call my father. He expects me home soon."

WHILE HE bathed and shaved, Jim wondered a little why he had done it. There had to be more than just the foolish impulse to share the company of Sheila Marton for a few hours of the time left to him.

He hadn't told her their destination. As they drove up to the prison yard she gave a little gasp of surprise. "This is a place worth getting acquainted with," said Jim, "if you are interested in the general subject of man's inhumanity to man."

Hurrying with the package containing the transmitter under his arm, he led Sheila to the Warden's office. The latter looked up with a haggard, uneasy glance as they entered.

Jim introduced her quickly. "This is Miss Marton, daughter of Dr. Marton of Trinity Chapel. I hoped she might accompany me to see Randolph in a spiritual advisory capacity."

"He has already talked with his pastor. It's up to him. Are you ready with whatever it is you want Randolph to do for you?"

Jim nodded. "I'd like to see him now, if I may."

A guard led them to the cell where the condemned man waited his fate. He was seated on the edge of the bunk, head in hands. He stood up slowly as glanced toward the door and recognized Jim Nearing.

Jim introduced Sheila. "I hoped you wouldn't mind if she came. She is interested in what I am trying to do."

"No—it's all right." Randolph shook his head apathetically. "Sit down."

Jim sat on the edge of the bunk, while Sheila took the only chair.

"I don't know whether I want to go through with this business of yours or not," said Randolph slowly. "I've almost decided I'd rather not monkey with it."

Jim felt sharp, cold throbs of alarm inside him. He tried to keep his voice calm. "I hope you won't change your mind, Dr. Randolph. I have no means of persuading you, of course, except to say that it's something that ought to be done."

"I'm not convinced of that. I'm not sure it's right—even if it will accomplish what you expect. I'm going tonight. In six months it will be your turn. The guard out there, the poor devil who pulls the switch on me, the judge—the jury—everybody gets his turn. Maybe it's an achievement to get it over with. Why should we try to interfere?"

"I don't know," said Jim, "except that since the beginning of history men have been battling the agents of death. Now, I think we're in a position to beat death itself. The whole instinct of the race is to this end. You and I are men of science. We have in common the desire to manipulate the materials and forces of the Universe. Life is the greatest and most subtle of these. Beyond this, we are simply men, and we share the common urge of all men—the desire for eternal life. Will you help?"

Randolph stared at the floor. He nodded at last, a faint, jerky motion of his head. "It won't work, of course."

"I can't promise anything," said Jim, "either for you, or for me. But if there is failure I share it with you."

"I keep thinking of Pat," said Randolph in sudden urgency. "I'm afraid for her. She's alone. If I do this for you will you go and stay with her so she won't be watching the clock as midnight comes?"

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"The laboratory—I have to be there," said Jim. "But Shiela—"

"Would you do that for me, Miss Marton? Tell Pat it's what I wanted. Pray with her and help her to believe this is not the end for us!"

"I'll be glad to," said Sheila softly.

"Thanks. I'll feel much better if I know she's with someone like you. Now you'd better show me what you want done with this gadget, Jim."

JIM drove slowly to the address Randolph had given them. "That must be it across the street," Shiela said, pointing to a new house.

It was on the edge of a new subdivision. The fresh-greenness of the lawns was visible in the light of the street lamps. But the grounds of Dr. Harry Randolph's house had not yet been planted. Jim imagined the doctor putting away his tools the night before the tragedy occurred. He wouldn't be back to put in his lawn.

They went up the walk to the dark house. Pat Randolph wouldn't be sitting there with the lights on, for all the neighbors to point out her ghastly vigil, Jim thought. She'd be sitting in the dark, bursting with anguish while the dark animal of Society fed on its prey.

Jim pressed the button of the doorbell. He repeated and listened. There was no sound of motion inside.

"What'll we do?" said Sheila. "We can't force our way in if she—"

"Pat—" Jim called softly, his face close to the door. "We've come from Harry. He asked us—"

He paused, a sudden tension in his body as he jerked hard on the doorknob in his hand.

"What is it?" said Sheila.

"Smell—around the edge of the door. That's not just new paint odor, is it?"

Sheila came closer. "Gas—!"

Jim darted away and grabbed a large clod from the unleveled yard. He hurled it at the large picture window overlooking the street. The glass shattered and a wave of stifling fumes burst over them. Jim grasped Sheila's arm and drew her to the car.

"Next door—" he said, "call the fire department to bring a resuscitator. The police, and a doctor, too."

From the car he obtained a flashlight. Then, breathing deeply in the clear air, he wadded a handkerchief over his nose and stepped through the broken window.

He didn't have far to go. Pat Randolph was slumped over the kitchen table near the gas stove. A half finished note was under her hands.

TWO HOURS LATER Jim and Shiela drove away. The doctors and firemen had done all they could. Pat was dead.

"I hope the fools don't tell Randolph before they put him in the chair tonight," Jim said bitterly. He glanced at his watch. "There're only a couple of hours left, and I've got a lot of checking to do at the lab. I'm going to cancel the rest of my invitation. You're too dog tired to see what's left. I'll have to ask you to drive home alone."

"I want to stay," Sheila said.

"No. This was all a mistake in the first place. I shouldn't have let you come."

"Please—I want very much to be with you at—that time—"

He hesitated, and gave in. "All right. It's up to you."

While Sheila sat in the room's one easy chair against a far wall, Jim checked, one by one, the multitude of circuits and emissions from the apparatus Harry Randolph now wore.

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By eleven thirty, everything was as near ready as he could make it.

He removed the soiled smock and took a creaky wooden chair beside the one in which Sheila sat. Together, they looked down the length of the brilliantly lighted laboratory. Neither felt like speaking. Their eyes remained fixed on the shining copper cage. It was composed of three sets of concentric coils each in a plane at right angles to the other two. From the surrounding lights it spread a pattern of fantastic whorls over all the room.

Beyond it hung the wall clock, the hands approaching midnight.

The waiting was like a vacuum. In it there grew a recognition of the enormity of his attempt. He could understand the disbelief of Sheila, of her father, of Harry Randolph. He wondered if he even believed, himself. Could that bright copper cage ever become the repository of a human soul? Could the circuits behind the panels provide a means of speech and contact and action in the physical world? Could it provide sanctuary for James Nearing when he could no longer tenant his own flesh?

"Is it so wrong, Sheila?" he asked suddenly. "Do you still say I should never have done this?"

She turned to him slowly, her eyes wide in an effort to understand. "All my faith and all my teachings tell me it is very wrong. If it were a way to cure your illness— But we'll soon know, and I pray that I may be the one who is wrong."

He got up as the phone rang sharply. It was the agreed upon call from the prison. "He's going to the death house now," said the warden in a flat voice. "Another three or four minutes—"

"I'm ready with my recorders," said Jim.

"One of the guards will give you the signal as the switch is closed."

All his power circuits were closed. The adjustments to the receptor-actuator circuits were complete. His eyes watched the sweep second hand of the clock as he kept the phone to his ear.

Silently, Sheila left her chair and came toward him. Her hand touched his unconsciously and he felt its coldness.

"He's in the chair," said the guard's voice. "Everybody is moving back—"

Jim's hand closed tightly over Sheila's.

"Now!"

Jim slammed the phone down. He took a step nearer the shining cage, his hand still clinging to Sheila's. Then for an instant there seemed to be within the coils a faint aura of exquisite light. It shimmered through a thousand spectrum shades.

And from the speaker there came a sound, an incredible sound of anguish and terror. It rose to a shrill, screaming pitch—and died.

At the end of it, so small as to be scarcely heard, another note, a tiny sobbing cry of gladness sprang up before the whole sound trailed into silence.

Sheila's hand in Jim's was trembling beyond all control. Her other fist was pressed against her mouth to stifle the short cry of fear that burst from her. "The sound—what was it, Jim—?"

He glanced back to the cage. There was no light now. His head jerked about to scan the meters. The tell-tale indicators had moved, but now they were dead. He reached for a dial and twisted it hard over. "Randolph! Can you hear me? Can you see us? Tell us if you're here, Randolph!"

There was no response. Dully, he

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recognized that he had expected none. Slowly his hand released Sheila's. He sagged against the laboratory table behind him, his eyes turned unseeingly to the floor.

"That sound—" Sheila repeated in a terrified voice. "Was it Harry Randolph?"

"I don't know. Whatever it was, it's gone now."

"And your machine failed—"

"So now you can say: 'I told you so.'" His eyes mirrored pain and rage as he looked up to her face. "Next, you'll be saying you're glad."

"I *am* glad! I'm very glad for the sake of Pat and Harry Randolph—and for your sake, too, Jim. This was an evil thing that could never be allowed to exist!"

"Get out!" He took a step toward her, his hand upraised.

She back in wide eyed fear. "Jim!"

"I said get out. Now!"

Only when he heard her running, frantic footsteps on the walk outside, and heard the reckless wheeling of her car away from the curb—only then did he put his head in his arms against the lab table and give way to the grief and failure and pain that swept through him.

THAT NIGHT was the first he had to yield to the narcotic which Dr. Thorsen had given him. He twisted for long hours in his bed, defying the bursting pain. Only when the drug finally took hold was he at last able to sleep, bathed in his own sweat.

The morning was Sunday, and he got up and dressed slowly, remembering a promise. He would go to Trinity Chapel to hear Dr. Marton. There was nowhere else to go, nothing else to do.

He hoped he might not encounter Sheila until afterwards, but she was standing just inside the doorway as he entered. As if she had been waiting—

"Sheila—"

"Don't say anything now, Jim. Everything's all right." She guided him toward a vacant seat.

There was a kind of peace in the gray, high-vaulted chapel. He could understand a little why people came there. And he felt the sweet presence, the warmth and faint perfume of Sheila sitting next to him. Once, when she turned quickly to the woman on the other side, the soft strands of her hair whipped against his cheek.

Dr. Marton chose to discourse on the subject of Life Eternal. Deliberately, Jim thought. He spoke in poetry and with flights of imaginative symbollism. It was so easy for those who had no specific date with death.

The end of the service brought Jim to the apology he owed Sheila. But she disarmed him at once. "Don't try to say a thing about last night," she said. "I owe you an apology for being so stupid to a man who's just witnessed the failure of the hopes of a lifetime. I prayed you would come today, and give me a chance to tell you I'm sorry. Will you come to the house and have dinner with us?"

HE HAD NO RIGHT to be sitting there at the table, he thought. Not with living people. But the immaculate linen and shining silver of the formal dining room created a momentary illusion that he still belonged with them.

Dr. Marton talked easily and entertainingly, of books and poetry, of welfare work and rehabilitation. Slowly, Jim became aware that Sheila and her father must not be living the life of dedicated seclusion he at first assumed. The minister spoke of their work in the hospitals, the welfare

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homes. They were decent, ordinary human beings trying to ease the hurt of lonely people in the loneliest of all worlds. He had no right to bitterness that they could not assume his burden as well.

After the meal, Dr. Marton excused himself. Sheila took Jim to the living room, in front of the fireplace, which was bright in contrast with the darkening sky outside.

"I want to know about you," said Sheila. "I don't know anything at all, about what's happened to you in the past, where you lived, whom you knew—"

There had never been any one who really wanted to hear him talk about himself before. But Sheila did. He was surprised at the pleasure of talking about the Kansas farm where he grew up. He even dared describe old Dr. Brown, their minister, in a way that made her laugh.

"Aren't any of your family here? Don't they know?"

He shook his head. "There'll be time enough for that. I have one brother and two sisters left. All in California. If I told them now they'd feel obligated to come and try to do something, and there's nothing they or anyone can do."

"There has to be *somebody*, Jim."

"Doc Thorsen—he'll do what needs to be done."

"Somebody besides him—"

"There's no one I know."

"I've had practical nurses' training," said Sheila. "I could follow Dr. Thorsen's orders. Will you come here and let me be that somebody, Jim?"

He stared at her. "You want me to come here—to die?"

She shook her head vigorously, and he saw the glistening at the corners of her eyes. "No! I want you to come here to live—for just as long as you can. I don't want you to die!"

"Sheila." He moved beside her and took her in his arms. "I must be crazy, letting you build up a sympathy for me like this."

She drew away, a challenging, half-bitter expression in her eyes. "Is that what it is? Is that all you see?"

"Sure. I'm lonely and scared. It helps to have your sympathy. I'm not a very brave guy. Your father knew that.

"I'm afraid of the dark and the annihilation. I don't have your calm faith that there's a meaningful existence afterward. I'm afraid because of all I've missed—"

Her head lay back against his arm. He felt the strands of her hair between his fingers. His other hand touched the warm flesh of her arm.

"All I've missed—" He drew her to him and pressed his face against her hair. "Sheila, why did it have to be like this? Why did it have to be so late? Why couldn't there have been even a year?"

Her arms tightened about him, her fingers caressing fiercely while she pressed her mouth against his. He held her while deep sobbing shook her whole body.

AFTERWARDS, they sat looking into the dull embers of the fire, apart, only their hands touching. Sheila was dry eyed now, but exhausted by her grief. "I always knew it would be like this," she said softly. "Suddenly, and without warning. I was sure of it the first day you came. But I've believed, too, that the God my father serves was fair and just. Now—I don't know any longer—"

She turned to him in fierce decision. "I always supposed I would have a big wedding in the Church, with father officiating. But we won't use

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our precious time for that. We can have a simple ceremony in his office—"

Jim was shaking his head. "No. You'll have enough forgetting to do without making a widow of yourself."

"Do you think I'd be satisfied with less?" Sheila's eyes blazed. "I'll be your widow—but first I'll be your wife. I'll have your child, and a thousand years from now your flesh will be alive. I won't let you die!"

HE ENTERED the darkened house and made his way to the laboratory without turning on the lights. He sank into the deep chair by the window, his breath coming heavily.

There was only one thing to do, and it had to be done tonight. If he ever held Sheila in his arms again it might be too late to turn back.

He switched on the lights and walked slowly to the sphere of copper. As far as he knew, there was no reason for failure of the apparatus. There was only one way of finding out why it had not functioned as predicted, and that was a worthwhile experiment with which to close his life. And much better than a bullet or a knife.

He moved the chair to a spot near the controls. With heavy rubber cable he rigged a set of wrist conductors. Then he arranged a sequence switch on the arm of the chair and wired it to the panel relays. A final lead went to a copper headband.

He sat down heavily in the chair and faced the suspended cage. He forced the image of Sheila from his mind. She would forget. She would have to forget.

His finger pressed the button.

THE STREETS were almost deserted as Sheila drove across town toward the University section. She tried to place the panic that had been in her since Jim had left that afternoon. There was only one answer. She should not have let him go. He was already lost to her. She had seen it in his eyes when he said goodbye.

The light was visible in the laboratory as she pulled up to the curb. That meant he was working again, but what was there for him to work on? She rang the doorbell frantically, then entered and ran up the stairs. Her voice held hysteria as she cried, "Jim, where are you? It's Sheila—"

At first, she thought he was asleep. His head lay back, and his eyes were closed. But above him, the sphere of copper bands was filled with a throbbing, pulsing light that seemed to beat in vain against imprisoning bars.

She knew she was screaming, but she couldn't help it. Then she was running toward the chair. She dropped to her knees and buried her face against his hands. There was warmth in his fingers still, and she looked in frantic hope at his face.

"Jim—Jim—why did you run away from me? Why couldn't you believe that whatever I knew of you would be enough to last a lifetime?"

She stood up slowly and turned about, looking for the speaker which he had said would carry the voice of the imprisoned life field. "Jim—are you here—can you see me—can you hear me?"

There was no answer.

As if in a dream, she began removing her coat and laid it carefully across a work table. Bending down, she removed the copper bands tenderly from Jim's dead hands and from his head, and lowered him gently to the floor.

She sat in the chair and fastened the terminals to her body as she had seen them on Jim's. And then a cry of anguish burst through the room.

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"Sheila! Get away from that chair!"

The voice of Jim.

"I thought you were watching," Sheila said calmly. "Am I getting it right? Do I simply push the button now?"

"You don't know what you're doing! Listen to me, Sheila! Take those things off and get away from that chair!"

The sphere pulsed violently with streamers of light. *"I did what I thought was right. But you were the ones who knew the truth. There is a soul in man, an eternal thing that never perishes. It goes on—somewhere—I don't know. But I can see them. They rise from the whole Earth like spears of light raining into the Heavens.*

"But not me. I'm trapped. This is a prison, halfway between Earth and Heaven, and perhaps that is what is called Hell. I've succeeded in my effort. I can do all the things I dreamed of. And that is the most futile thing of all. I'm stopped. Unless I'm freed I can never achieve the purpose there might have been in my existence.

"Sheila, I want you to—"

"Wherever you are—In Heaven or in Hell—I am coming to you. I'll share it with you, whatever you've created for yourself."

She had heard the sound of a car and the curb outside, the closing of a door. It could only be her father.

"You heard the screams of Harry Randolph," Jim was saying, his voice a torrent now. *"He screamed because he saw for an instant the terror of this prison to which I had brought him. Then Pat freed him. Free herself, she was able to overcome the field. That was the cry of gladness we heard. Sheila, take off the electrodes, go to the panel—"*

She heard the footsteps on the stairway. She closed her eyes while her lips murmured a prayer. "On, God, and my father, forgive me—"

Her finger pressed the button.

DR. AARON MARTON stopped at the doorway. He sensed within the room the strange weight of eternity. He saw the relaxed body of Sheila, a smile upon her face, and he went toward it. He knelt and wept, holding the dead hands of her and Jim Nearing. He murmured aloud, "Forgive them, Father; they knew not what they did."

Rising, he turned to the sphere of madly vibrant light. He did not know its meaning, but he felt the presence in the room. Then there came a familiar voice. *"We're here, Father. Jim and I. Don't hate us for what we've done. Help us—"*

The minister felt his hands tremble and the blood leave his face at the tone of agony in that voice. "Sheila! Sheila, what's wrong? Where are you?"

"Free us, Father! Turn off the power to the machine that holds us. We can't be of Earth any longer. Let us go where we belong."

Dr. Marton moved in a daze toward the panel of switches behind the chair. He raised a hand toward the ones Sheila indicated. He murmured softly, "Be good to Sheila, Jim, wherever you go with her. Guard her, keep her. May God have mercy on you both!"

"Father—!"

He flung open the switch. There was an instant of sound like that of shimmering crystal. The fire died away in the copper sphere. Then Aaron Marton buried his face in his hands and let the deep, sobbing cries shake his body.

It was almost dawn when he went downstairs and used Jim's phone to call the police. —RAYMOND F. JONES

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MEET THE AUTHORS

GAVIN FROST, B.Sc., Ph.D., D.D., is Archbishop of the Church of Wicca, New Bern, North Carolina with national headquarters in Salem, Missouri, branches in several states and worldwide membership. He is Marshal of the Gold Star of England, with the right to wear the Saffron Robe and *one of the very few Witches in the Western Hemisphere* privileged to wear the authentic mark of initiation on his wrist. Although descended from a long line of mystics and scholars, and formerly a Vice-President and Director of International Operations for major aerospace companies, he prefers to be thought of as a humble teacher.

Mrs. YVONNE FROST, A.A., D.D., with her husband Gavin Frost, devotes her time to giving private instruction and publishing *Survival,* the newsletter of the Church of Wicca, of which she is a Bishop.

Articles by or about Gavin and Yvonne Frost have appeared in such national publications as *Midnight* and the *National Enquirer.*

with Magic Witchcraft. For example, there is a spell called the "Cross Not My Path" ritual, for people who are having neighbor trouble. When you use it, you know you will never again have trouble with this neighbor!

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Barry Malzberg needs no introduction here; his collaborator, Bill Pronzini, is perhaps even more widely known—most recently for his mystery novels (although he too was once a regular contributor to this magazine). Herewith, the fruit of their collaboration, a delightfully wryly told tale about—

ANOTHER BURNT-OUT CASE

BILL PRONZINI & BARRY MALZBERG

Illustrated by JOE STATON

I WAS SITTING in my trailer, thinking once more about the imminent collapse of Western Civilization, when the Sicilian Snare Drum and the Amazing Pyromaniac came in and the Snare Drum said, "Boss, we have figured a way out of all this."

"There is no way out," I said. "We are sentenced for life in Sweetwater, Texas."

"Not necessarily," the Amazing Pyromaniac said. That is, I am pretty sure it was he who made that comment and the Snare Drum the first to speak. It is not easy for me at the age of 61 to completely individuate the employees of my small carnival, *Webb Carter's Wonderama;* but then again, they sort themselves out in the long run. "We really have figured out how to shuck this place."

"Indeed?" I said.

The Amazing Pyromaniac nodded. His stage name is Giraldo and he has a certain integrity, which is to say that he has never set fire to any person other than himself. "The answer," he said, "is insurance."

Insurance?"

"Insurance," the Snare Drum said.

I said, "We already have insurance. I have always complied with all of the Federal laws on the matter. We carry a large general floater with the Firehouse Fund."

Giraldo's eyes glowed reverently. "Ah yes," he said. "Fire."

The Snare Drum said, "This general floater carries a triple indemnity clause for loss of life during a public performance. We have checked. The total of such a triple indemnity death would be two hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars."

I pondered this information for a time, not having previously investigated the policy to any degree. "I am beginning to see the point," I said at length. "In fact the beauty of the conception, to coin a phrase, is now unflowering in all the dense and complicated corridors of my mind."

"We knew it would," one of them said.

"But there arises a question. Who is going to die? Who is elected to

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perish for the greater good of us all? I cannot say that I detect a suicidal eagerness in either of your faces."

"We did not think it necessary for anyone to actually die," one of them said.

The other one said, "For the purpose of collecting on the triple indemnity clause, it would seem that the convincing *appearance* of death would be sufficient."

"Kindly elaborate."

"Flame," the Amazing Pyromaniac said fervidly. "We will use the flames for which I am so well-known and with which I have constructed my successful if not lucrative career. Someone will appear to perish, leaving a cleverly unrecognizable *corpus delecti*."

I pondered further. 'Which someone did you have in mind?"

"Well, it cannot be me," the Snare Drum said, "inasmuch as I must play dramatic accompaniment; otherwise, we will have no musical conviction in the performance."

"This is true," I said. "Therefore, it is obvious who the someone must be."

"We expected you would see it our way."

"I am not that person," I said. "I am not a performer, as you well know. Thus, there is only one person left in our little troup who qualifies, and that person is Big Tiny." I smiled. "Do you not agree?"

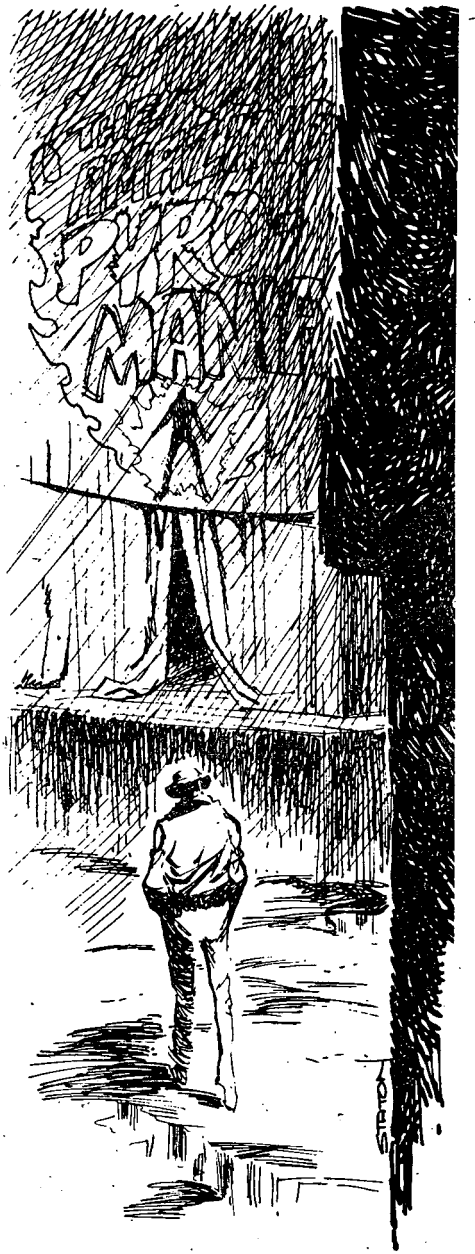
They nodded slowly. "We agree," one of them said.

"Have you discussed the plan with him?"

"Not as yet."

"I will attend to that," I said, "and converse further with you after I have done so. I have no doubt that he will see it just as I have."

"Webb," one of them said, "we are



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glad that you do not consider our proposal as in any way indicative of moral corruption, but merely as a sane and wise means in which to get out of all this on our shared proceeds."

"It is not moral failure," I said, "it is only symptomatic of the collapse of Western Civilization."

"Surely," the other one said, and both of them departed. The closed door of my trailer rattled in the wind.

I considered matters more carefully. After a while I stood, went outside, and walked down the small midway in the rain. *Webb Carter's Wonderama* takes up no more than half a city block. It is a very small show, although of course it completely lacks exceptional talent. One Amazing Pyromaniac, one Sicilian Snare Drum, one 61-year-old proprietor, and two people of the small persuasion; our former major attraction, the Mad Ghoul, had long since withdrawn under fortunate circumstances.

Little drops of water flicked off my craggily distinguished features, or what I like to think of as my craggily distinguished features, as I neared the tent in which Big Tiny and Little Tiny dwelt. I knocked on the flap of the tent, which is not an easy thing to do considering the resiliency of tent flaps. Momentarily Little Tiny appeared. She is in her late twenties, weighs approximately thirty pounds, stands exactly three feet tall, and is quite striking.

"Hello, Emma," I said politely. "Is Big Tiny in?"

"Hello, Webb," she said. "Yes he is."

When I entered the tent I saw Big Tiny sitting on his little bed. He weighs approximately thirty-eight poinds and stands three feet two; this makes him the dominant member of the couple. I find it easier to differentiate between Big Tiny and Little Tiny than I do my other employees.

Big Tiny said. "Have you come with the paychecks, Boss?"

"I have come with something much better."

"Nothing could be better than money."

"This is true," I said. I paused. "Perhaps we should talk privately."

"Well, Emma and I are husband and wife."

"I acknowledge the legal sanctions. But it would be better if this discussion were conducted privately for the present good of all concerned. Will you accept that, Emma?"

"I will accept that," she said. She is really a beautiful person. "I will simply be off in our van for the market in Sweetwater proper, and in a trifle will return with a little bag of groceries." All of us in *Webb Carter's Wonderama* speak in roughly the same fashion, but then our rhetoric *should* be similar; we have been living together for such a long time.

When Little Tiny had slipped gracefully through the tent flap I gave my attention to Big Tiny. "You come from Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, I believe," I said.

"No, the Bushwick section."

"You would like to return there, would you not?"

"I would."

"You would like to retire in luxury and comfort?"

"Webb," he said, "are you leading up to another ploy to circumvent your financial obligations to us?"

"No," I said, "I am leading up to your death."

"My *what?*"

"Your death—or rather, your apparent death. It is, as you will soon un-

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derstand, for the good of all of us in *Webb Carter's Wonderama.*"

He stared somewhat sullenly at his feet, which was not a difficult activity under his physical circumstances. "Webb—"

"Allow me to explain," I said, and did so.

The light of knowledge appeared in his eyes. "I see. But are you sure we will be able to get away with it?"

"Certainly," I said. "Do not worry. You must think only of your share of the two hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars, for with that share neither you nor Emma will have to worry about purchasing little bags of groceries for the rest of your lives."

"How am I to apparently perish?"

"In flames. You will become, along with Giraldo the Amazing Pyromaniac, a flaming little person; you will do this in front of a representative of the Firehouse Fund whom we will call in to witness what we will say is a new and interesting act." My mind had been working all of this time, as one may perceive. "Your death will appear to be extremely tragic, not only for the obvious reason, but because it will also bring about the ultimate demise of *Webb Carter's Wonderama.*"

"What of the details of my flaming, ah, demise?"

"It is not up to me to handle details," I said. "You and Giraldo must work them out between you. There will, of course, be a way. There is always a way."

"This is true," Big Tiny said, and for the first time he smiled. Then he paused reflectively. "Even though you did not wish to discuss the matter in front of Emma," he said, "she must nonetheless be told."

"Naturally," I said. "Everyone must work together here in order that we may retire separately."

ALTHOUGH I tend to dislike transitional material of any kind—it is my belief that life itself provides the only transition of any import or consequence—I suppose I should explain how contact was made with one George Feuer of the Sweetwater office of the Firehouse Fund; and that four mornings subsequent, at precisely ten o'clock, he came to the grounds of *Webb Carter's Wonderama* in order to witness the initial practice performance of a new act for which, I said, we hoped to secure additional coverage. He was a large man with a ruddy complexion and strange highlights in his eyes. He did not speak much and seemed somehow bewildered by my description of the new act, which I advised him was to be billed as The Amazing Pyromaniac and The Flaming Little Person.

When he arrived on this morning, I ushered him to the main tent and introduced him to the other members of *Webb Carter's Wonderama*, who were all grouped near the Amazing Pyromaniac's platform. There was some dialogue, which I find unnecessary to set down here, and then the Sicilian Snare Drum took his position in our makeshift orchestra pit and commenced to flay himself with palms and knuckles in preparation for the event. Meanwhile, Giraldo and Big Tiny made advance consultations and arranged their necessary props.

The props necessary for the illusion of Big Tiny's death had, of course, already been arranged, and the illusion itself was quite ingenious. The platform upon which the Amazing Pyromaniac sets fire to himself during his thrice-weekly performance contains a well-hidden trapdoor, should he ever lose control of the fire which

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he allows to engulf him and therefore need to quickly escape. Below the trap door is a tiny cubicle filled with water. It was through this trapdoor and into this cubicle that Big Tiny would be thrust during the dual immolation of himself and Giraldo, under the protective screen of the flames; and it was in this cubicle that he would secrete himself until Feuer could be induced to leave the immediate premises. Then Big Tiny would emerge and seek a more permanent hiding place somewhere on or near the grounds, until the time arrived for his triumphal return to Bensonhurst with his share of the insurance money. (It is not difficult, naturally, for a little person of three feet two and thirty-eight pounds to locate a hiding place which cannot be detected by individuals of the larger persuasion.)

One might well note, of course, that we would need some manner of physical evidence which George Feuer would view as the remains of Big Tiny. Therein lies the ingeniousness of the plan. The Sicilian Snare Drum, or perhaps it was the Amazing Pyromaniac, recalled that the Mad Ghoul had left with us—as a result of his arrest on an old warrant of such bizarre circumstance that I cannot to this day bear to discuss it—a large trunk which contained, among a variety of other interesting items, a collection of simulated flesh, bones and dental remnants. That is, I chose to believe they were simulated. In any event, these items were appropriated and subsequently placed inside pockets of Giraldo's specially constructed asbestos uniform—the same type of uniform, I should add, which Big Tiny himself would wear. Behind the wall of flame, just after Big Tiny was thrust through the trapdoor, Giraldo would produce the remnants and place them on the platform.

Feuer and I, along with Emma, took seats in the nearby grandstand to wait for the commencement of the performance. Staring across at the platform, Feuer said to me, "Damned strange stuff, Carter, that's all I can say. No wonder you people pay such high premiums—setting each other aflame and all."

"People need entertainment," I said abstractedly.

"Entertainment?"

"It is all a device, all an effect," I said, "and it is merely the illusion of pain which we give the audience, not pain itself. People are severely disturbed these days; they feel that they have lost essential control of their lives. Perhaps watching a little person consumed by flame along with an Amazing Pyromaniac will cheer them." I was merely filling in time, as you have no doubt realized; I was at that moment consumed by distraction and nervousness. What if the scheme did not work? What if something went wrong?

"Nothing will go wrong," I said to Feuer. "No one will really be hurt, least of all the little person known as Big Tiny."

He nodded dubiously.

"Giraldo is inordinately competent in his pursuits, you know," I said. "He first set himself aflame in Sioux Falls at the age of fourteen. His father then sent him to orphanage."

Feuer shuddered. He seemed to be in a strange state of excitation now, I noticed. He was breathing uneasily and he continually rubbed his palms together, as if he were rolling a stick between them. "Terrifying stuff," he said. "Terrifying."

"Ad demonstratum," I said. I had

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studied some Latin at the Rénssalaer Polytechnical Institute before they threw me out during the Depression. "*Reductio ad absurdum.*"

"That's easy for *you* to say, " Feuer said. "I never had the opportunity to learn French. I had to go straight to work when I dropped out of high school. I worked myself up in life and the company."

I said nothing in response to this. I was watching Giraldo as he and Big Tiny finished their preparations and strode to the center of the platform. When they were ready Giraldo motioned over to me and to the Sicilian Snare Drum, who began to rhythmically thump his chest. On my left, Emma held her breath and clutched her hands together in her tiny lap; on my right, Feuer began to tremble and an odd little crackling sound came from his throat.

Almost casually, Giraldo struck a match and set his hair on fire.

"Fire!" he shouted, in the fashion of one commencing a pursuit which gives him great joy.

"Fire!" Emma shrieked, in the fashion of any frightened person of the female persuasion.

"Fire!" Big Tiny screamed, in the fashion of a little person being immolated.

"Fire!" Feuer flared, in the fashion of a man hypnotized by the sight of flame.

Orange tendrils sprang from the Amazing Pyromaniac's hand. The Sicilian Snare Drum struck 6/8, a very difficult double-waltz time restricted normally to Johann Strauss the Elder, the third movement of Ludwig van Beethoven's Eighth Symphony, and certain fire music. Big Tiny, looking suddenly frightened, pressed in close to Giraldo. And the flames leapt from the Amazing Pyromaniac's right to left hand, and then there was a sheet of fire and I heard Feuer moan, and in that moment the flames engulfed both the figures on the platform.

Big Tiny wailed; then, suddenly, he was gone.

"My God," Feuer rumbled, "he's gone!"

Emma moaned terribly—and skillfully, I thought—and all of us rushed toward the platform where Giraldo now stood alone. Just before we got there he extinguished himself in that mysterious way he has; and when all of the flames were out, there was no sign at all of Big Tiny, or of the simulated remains which had been appropriated from the Mad Ghoul's trunk.

Giraldo looked convincingly horrified; he cried, "I couldn't help it! Something must have happened to his asbestos suit!" Then he flung himself to his knees, found the secret catch on the trapdoor, released it. The opening appeared, and beneath it, the cubicle filled with water.

Only the cubicle was not, at this time, filled with water.

And it did not, at this time, contain the live form of Big Tiny.

What it did contain was the remains of a charred little body—and I knew illusion had become reality after all.

Emma fainted into Feuer's quaking arms. Giraldo wept. The Snare Drum thumped his chest softly in 4/4 dirge time. I shook my head and knelt with my shoulders slumped beside Little Tiny as Feuer lowered her to the sawdust.

Someone—I believe it was Feuer—said, "Awful. Awful. I can't believe it. How could he have been burned to nothing more than this, to a vague lump of smoking charcoal?"

"My clothing is specially treated," the Amazing Pyromaniac said tear-

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fully, "with a highly flammable substance. When I am on fire the heat is intense—so intense I am myself sometimes burned through the asbestos. Without such an asbestos suit . . . " He spread his arms in a helpless manner.

"I need some air," Feuer said. His eyes had the look of blackened cinders; all the passion within had been extinguished, much as had the flames upon Giraldo's body.

"The authorities should be summoned," I said. "There is a telephone in my trailer."

"Yes." he said. "Telephone. Yes. Authorities and telephone." He used a handkerchief to wipe his forehead and then went away.

I looked at Giraldo and the Sicilian Snare Drum; they looked at me; we all looked away. Big Tiny was dead, truly dead, terribly dead, and we could not believe it. I most of all could not believe it, just as I could not believe that Western Civilization was due for imminent collapse. But it was so.

Yes, oh yes, it was so.

LIFE, however, goes on. Of the grief and shock of Emma and the Amazing Pyromaniac and the Sicilian Snare Drum, of the arrival of the police, and of Feuer's consternation upon coming to terms with the liability of the Firehouse Fund, nothing more need be said. Time passed. A full day passed.

Then, late the following afternoon, Feuer appeared at the door of my trailer. He no longer seemed dismayed; in fact, he looked rather grim and not a little authoritative.

"We seem to have a small problem here," he said.

"Problem?" I said.

"With your claim. The forensic people in the Sweetwater police department are not entirely satisfied with the remains of Isaac Spritzer, a.k.a. Big Tiny."

I frowned. "Does this mean you are not immediately prepared to pay us our justified triple indemnity?"

"This is what it means," Feuer said. "If forensic is not satisfied, we at the Firehouse Fund are not satisfied."

"Well, you cannot deny that you saw Big Tiny go up in flames, as did we all. Giraldo, the Amazing Pyromaniac, has been incommunicado ever since the unfortunate accident; he blames himself."

"Nevertheless," Feuer said.

"I do not know what more you can reasonably expect," I said. "After all, *ice* cannot be expected to verify a *corpus delecti* on one who has been immolated."

"Let us discuss matters at greater length," Feuer said. "Outside, perhaps? While we stroll about the midway?"

I sighed. "Very well, " I said. "And we shall tell sad stories of the deaths of little people."

He gave me a strange look. "Pardon?"

"Shakespeare," I said. "*Henry the Fourth?* No. *Richard the Third.*"

We left my trailer and strolled down the deserted midway. We had not had a show since yesterday's tragedy, of course, and would never have one again. But then, judging from past attendance figures, Sweetwater would almost certainly not miss us.

As we neared the main tent, I seemed able to detect little flickers of flame from within. I said, "Giraldo must have come out of his shell and begun reconstituting his act. The old trouper has not abandoned his craft."

"Why don't we go inside?" Feuer

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said.

We entered the tent. On the platform I sat the Amazing Pyromaniac and the Sicilian Snare Drum working with the requisite props of Giraldo's act. Feuer and I took seats on the grandstand, as we had the previous day. Feuer seemed disinclined to speak, contrary to what he had said in my trailer a few moments earlier; instead we watched Giraldo prepare, heard the Snare Drum begin to thump his tympanic chest. Soon, flame blossomed from the Amazing Pyromaniac's fingertips, passing rapidly from one to the next; he spread his arms in his impressive way and created a rope of fire, then bent and brought blazing tendrils from his shoetips to his head. Then he disappeared behind a wall of fire, and—

And incredibly, as if from the very center of the conflagration, there appeared Big Tiny: reconstructed amid the flames.

He was pointing, pointing straight at me. "You, Webb!" he shouted. "You did this to me!"

I jumped to my feet and hurried to the edge of the platform. "You're dead," I said. "I made sure of that—didn't I?"

"No," Big Tiny said. "Your plot to murder me did not succeed after all, Webb. Giraldo discovered that you—it could only have been you—exchanged my asbestos suit for a flammable cotton one, and then emptied the water from the cubicle under the trapdoor. He immediately effected another exchange of suits."

"But how could you have gotten out of the cubicle during the performance?"

"We constructed another exit, carefully concealed. Or so we thought." His voice turned sadly sardonic. "We plotted to carry through the illusion of my death only until we could collect the triple indemnity from the Firehouse Fund. Then it was my intention to confront you. Unfortunately, things have not worked out as any of us planned."

I realized Feuer was beside me. I also realized that there were several uniformed policemen nearby, and that Emma was there as well. Western Civilization, it seemed, was already in the throes of collapse.

Feuer's eyes reflected the flames surrounding Giraldo and Big Tiny, and his voice crackled when he spoke: "Extinguish," he told them.

Giraldo extinguished himself and Big Tiny; they stood smoking in the center of the platform.

Feuer released a shuddering breath: "Now then," he said, "where were we? Ah yes." He fixed me with a cindered eye. "You see, Carter, I discovered the second exit from the cubicle. I also discovered, with the help of the Sweetwater forensic people, the fact that the remains which Big Tiny placed inside the cubicle before departing were those of several different and quite ancient individuals. Thus I confronted Giraldo and the Sicilian Snare Drum, and was able to elicit their confession when I suggested you would all be charged with grave-robbing—or worse—in addition to attempted extortion of the Firehouse Fund."

"He left us no choice," the Amazing Pyromaniac said. Or perhaps it was the Sicilian Snare Drum.

"No choice at all," the Snare Drum said. Or perhaps it was the Amazing Pyromaniac. "Which is the reason we have compiled with this ploy of his to expose you, Webb, by forcing you into a self-admission of your guilt."

Feuer looked at me. "I can under-

(cont. on page 73)

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Janet Fox introduced Arcana to these pages with "A Witch in Time" (September, 1973) and "She-Bear" (January, 1974); now, after too long an absense, Arcana returns to confront both—

DEMON AND DEMOISELLE

JANET FOX

Illustrated by TONY GLEESON

ARCANA pulled rein on a wooded mountainside and lifted her arm where the nervous falcon swayed heavily, clasping and unclasping his talons to steady his uncertain perch. His back and wing feathers were the sad color between blue and gray; his chest and legs were shadowbarred. She contemplated the vasty reach of sky for some moments and at last saw a pigeon flying. She hastily removed the black leather hood and the jesses and sent the falcon upward with an arm thrust and a cry. He climbed as if there were no such thing as gravity, and overtaking the pigeon in his speed, wheeled above it, windwalking. Just as he would have stooped to take the helpless bird in his talons, the falcon's body jerked, a few feathers drifting away on the wind. The great wings parachuted the fall, but to Arcana on the ground it took an inordinately long time for the body to fall to earth. She ran to where it lay among some trees and knelt beside the mound of rumpled feathers. Folly to think that one could be attacked to a thing as stupid and rapacious as a bird of prey, but the beauty of its flight, the lofty power of it—The bird was transfixed by an arrow of ivory with peacock feathers on the end of the shaft; it looked like a decorative piece, not a weapon. She ran back into the open, to search for a bowman or fleeing horseman, but nothing moved on the mountainside. A dark wisp of hair by her ear moved, and she started, but decided that it was a gust of wind that had frightened her. Her huge black horse was pawing the earth, the feathers of his forelegs shaking like fine black fringe. "Sooo, Sable," she shoothed him. "We're both spooked by nothing. Or we can hope it's nothing."

Sable's basin-sized hooves rattled the drawbridge and struck fire from the cobbles of the courtyard. She felt better when the creaking machinery had lifted the bridge into a massive wall behind her. She left the horse to the grooms and entered the castle. She doubled herself as she entered, reflecting darkly in the polished wood of the floor. Everything seemed good, the blood red hangings on the walls, the great hearth blazing like Hell-Mouth, throwing off the chill of such a large drafty room. Her Senechal Milston came in to personally diverst her of cloak and guantlets.

"I watched you ride in just now as

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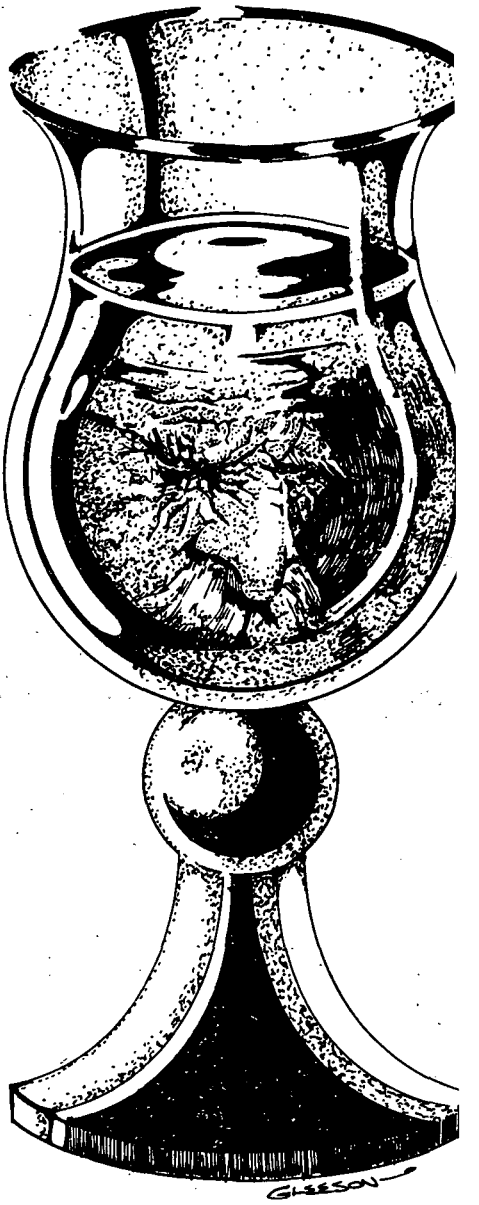
if someone pursued. And where is your favorite, Windrider?"

Stony visaged, Arcana dropped into a straightbacked chair as large as a throne and every bit as uncomfortable. "He was shot by—" her explanation halted while she rummaged for mislaid reasons. "Some poacher hiding in the brush of the mountainside," she finished lamely.

Milston said nothing, and drew his face into careful lines of politeness, telling her that for all the world, he wouldn't pry.

"His wounds, Milston, of course it wasn't just any ordinary poacher or huntsman. The arrow came from nowhere; I misdoubt me it was shot from a bow at all. And it isn't just that; a kind of dread haunts my bones like an ague. I must to the tower."

The tower, in contrast to the chambers below, was a cold and barren place. Spiders had left samples of their craft in niches of the bare rock walls and rats' droppings collected in the concave risers of the stone stairway. She produced a huge iron key from inside her clothing, opened the massive lock and let herself into the single round room where she practiced her craft. Yellowing scrolls and books with moldering, flaking bindings were shelved along the walls. Bottles and and jars filled with questionable substances of every color and texture filled the interstices between the books. On a rickety wooden table an iron-bound book lay open to reveal slanting lines of spidery black handwriting and a scrying glass half filled with water. Alongside these was a toad, looking very dry and petrified. Set in his back among the warty excresences of his skin was a red jewel, filled with fiery light. When she moved the book the ancient toad hopped off silently, toad-



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wise.

With a bit of charcoal she drew the pentagram on the stones of the floor, recoloring a faded design that had often been drawn there. Lighting five candles she placed them at the corners of the pentagram and began the ritual, referring now and again to the open book on the table. Sometime later she dropped onto a wooden bench, pushing dark strands of hair off her damp forehead. Stolidly she rose to try again, because she had never failed at this before. Moments later the scrying glass and the book went flying off the table, one to splash and shatter on the stones, the other to fetch up against the wall, a broken black wing. "God's Little Body!" she swore. "Hrinegar, do you know aught of this?"

A small melancholic voice came from the floor and the aged toad hopped in its silkily silent progression, pausing at the sorceress' feet. "Mayhap your demon has been ensorceled by another mage."

"But that demon was the only one I could summon. It took years of study and experimentation to produce him. Without him, I can't even call myself sorceress. Who did it; do you know?"

"No, but if you hadn't acted in such haste, you may have scryed something on the matter."

"I'm too choleric to concentrate on that now."

"Then perhaps you don't care to know."

She gritted her teeth for a moment, then found another glass goblet and poured some water into it. Scrying consisted mainly of hours of staring and wasn't among Arcana's favorite activities, but she bent dutifully over the glass, and when she felt that her eyes were frozen in their sockets, an image began to form in the midst of clear water.

"I see," she said in a carefully controlled voice, so as to maintain her concentration.

"What do you see?" asked the toad peevishly (though everything he said sounded peevish).

"A face, old, more than old, seamed and eroded, hanks of greasy gray hair hanging about a bald pate, a nose long and drooping as an icicle, but his eyes—"

"Yes?"

"His eyes make it seem as if he is wearing a mask. They glow with the hot-bloodedness of youth, yet they also seem to be looking out of some other, unwholesome world." Her voice grew more excited. "In his hands he holds an ivory arrow. He's our man, but—who is he?"

"I should not tell you," said the toad in a voice more dismal (if that were possible) than heretofore.

"Why not? He has my demon and I want him back."

"That's why I dare not tell you, a neophyte, a beginner, a rank—"

"Of course you'll tell me Hrinegar, old familiar." She stooped to grab him and he punished her toadfashion by wetting copiously.

She made a disgusted noise and dried her hands on the legs of her hunting costume. "But you *will* tell me." She grabbed him more carefully this time, and his skinny old legs thrashed comically.

"Ascarius, you fool, Ascarius. He has been an archimage longer than you have been a human, longer than I have been a toad, longer than the oak-giant in the forest has been a tree. He has read all the old books. He has written some of them before reading them. He commands seven demons!"

"Eight," she said, putting Hrinegar

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carefully onto the floor where he loped silently away. his stone spitting sparks. "That cony-catcher has preyed off his fellow mages for the last time. I'll to his keep and teach the old dodderer a lesson."

ARCANA paused before the drawbridge. the massive head of the shire. Sable. poised above her shoulder as she pulled on her gauntlets. Though she had looked slim and feminine in the close-fitting hunting garb, with her long hair plaited. she now looked bulky in a leathern vest and thick broidered cloak. and beneath the flat cap her hair hung in bluntly cut tufts. Mil had suggested if she had to go, she go in the guise of a wandering scop. He had even found a battered old lute and hung it over her shoulder. He had done a good job disguising her. but still he hemmed and hawed and invented excuses to detain her.

"I'm pleased to know you fear for me," said Arcana. "but there's no need. Do you doubt my horsemanship?"

"Of course not, my Lady."

"Is it my skill with lance, with bow or dagger?"

"Oh no, my Lady."

"Then what is it?"

"Your cooking, my Lady. Take no offense, but I am afraid you may fall ill. Have—you taken sufficient provisions?"

Arcana swung up and signaled the man on the parapet. "I'll worry about you, too," she said. "If the villagers below realize that I'm devoid of power, they'll arrange a torchlight procession and come up to tear apart my keep, stone by stone."

"We'll keep up appearances as long as possible. God speed."

"Fare thee well, Milston."

MANY AND MANY. the miles Arcana rode in rain and sun. And too diverse and blood-chilling were her adventures. up hill and down dale, to tell the whole of them. but after her travels had left her seasoned and wisened. she came to an inn to pass the night.

As she prepared to enter she heard a terrible din. She sidestepped a human projectile that careened out the door. Waiting until the noise had subsided. she entered cautiously, her hand om the hilt of her dagger. A ruffian was curled in a corner in a posture too awkward for sleep. Another lay beneath a table, his jerkin soaked with blood; luckily most of it was streaming from his nose. She flattened herself against the wall as a mace was slammed onto a heavy oaken table with a rending crash. The man in armor dominated the room like a monster of metal, but he clattered and clanged as he swayed unsteadily.

A man hiding beneath a table waved her away. "He's taken leave of his senses. Too much strong drink."

The man in armor began to growl deep in his throat as he yanked at the mace, now inextricably one with the wood of the table. "For the Holy Rood!" he bellowed. "Onward to the grail."

Arcana began to move crabwise along the wall, but any movement was a mistake. The knight bore down on her like a juggernaut. "Avaunt pagan dog!"

The grid of a visor was thrust into her face, and a tang of ale was wafted toward her. "Who be you, stranger?"

"Arcan, a scop, teller of thrilling tales of bold knights and—" She thrust the lute between herself and him. His metal glove plucked the strings with a discordant sound.

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"By Saint Allidore, I'll hear some of your drivel, and it had best be good."

Since in her travels she had neglected to learn to play the instrument she banged the strings once or twice and began to sing-song a tale that she devised on the spot. It was mostly utter nonsense about a faithful knight and his lady who sickened and died.

"Oh, my heart is broken. Oh my heart is sore. Verily, verily, now I shall die," she finished, giving the lute a strum for good measure. Having been caught up in her own creation, she looked up to see how the crazed knight was taking it.

"Oh my heart is sore," echoed the knight. "That's the saddest, most beautiful tale that ever I heard." He slumped onto a bench with a clang, his visored head resting in a pool of ale, his shoulders heaving.

"Thanks, stranger," said the hiding man, coming up to clap her on the shoulder.

"Verily," chimed in another who had been crouched by the hearth. "He'll be all right now. Simply boyish high spirits."

"Spirits of some type. Are any of you the innkeeper? I wish lodging for the night."

The knight lifted his head from the table and removed his helmet, displaying a pair of bleary blue eyes in a smiling red-bearded face. "You can share my room this night," he said, "for you cooled my madness with your song, and I fain would hear more of your tales."

"I must needs refuse this gentle offer."

What seemed a half ton of metal descended on her shoulders and she was dragged down an ill-smelling corridor and deposited half crushed in a dimly lit room.

The knight began noisily to remove his armor. "Help me, man, my squire is one who lies in the tavern bleeding."

Arcana unbuckled the greaves from his shins while he divested himself of the rest, tossing it into a dully gleaming pile on the floor.

"Make yourself comfortable, Sirrah. The bed's got plenty of room. I told the landlord if there're lice in it, I'll spit him like a capon."

"I'm comfortable as I am." Arcana lay back on the rustling straw mattress and watched as the knight set up a tiny shrine and knelt before it.

A few moments later the bed creaked *in extremis* and the knight shouldered her aside. She was uncomfortable, but not too afraid, as he didn't seem the type to molest boys.

"A knight must never forget his spiritual duties. My name is Ethelred of Ironcastle, but they call me Quickspur."

"Well met," said Arcana.

"Where are you bound, balladeer?"

"Where the wind takes me."

"By Allidore's sainted relics, why not accompany me on my travels? You're a singer in search of songs, so why not celebrate me?"

"Why not indeed." Arcana felt laughter overcoming her. Would he spit her like a capon if he heard her laugh?

"There are sure to be adventures amany because my quest takes me to the keep of a terrible magician, Ascarius. He holds captive the loveliest of maidens, Ermintrude, daughter of Lord Tabor. If I can rescue her, I shall receive her hand in marriage, though I know I am unworthy to touch the hem of her gown. A knight must adore his lady chastely, from afar."

Arcana had stopped shaking with laughter. "I'd be honored to accom-

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pany you, and to compose a saga at least of your victory over Acarius." *And my own*, she added silently.

"DRAGONSLOND," said Quickspur, gestruing toward a landscape of rocks and broken hills and stringy vegetation. The very trees were wind twisted and ugly as if the land itself were cursed. Arcana saw a goat-footed unicorn atop a shaft of stone, but when she tried to point it out, it was gone. They passed a massive circle of standing stones and had an argument over it, Quickspur asserting that it had been raised by giants in the youth of the world, Arcana theorizing that such heavy stones could only be magicked into place; she suggested the magic of sound.

"Maybe they were whistled into place," said Quickspur laughing at her.

"Hsst. I hear something. It sounds like the clink of mail—perhaps we are pursued by robbers."

"If so, it'll be the last time they molest honest men."

"No, look!"

It continued its slow majestic progress across their field of vision, its taloned feet splaying under its great weight, the scales of its sides chinking and clinking as it walked, its pointed tail drawing a wide straight track behind it. The sunlight shivered off the scales, dark green, black and bronze, here and there a glint of sapphire, a shimmer of ruby. Their horses began to dance and snort. The dragon turned his massive head in their direction, nictitating membranes flipping down over his lizard's eyes with chitinous click. A hiss issued from his maw and a dribble of smoke leaked out. A golden crest on head and shoulders began to rise.

"Let us flee," suggested Arcana. "Our horses are surely fleeter of foot than this weighty beast."

"Nonsense. Stand clear now."

"S'wounds, you're not going to—"

"Watch carefully, you'll want to chronicle this." Quickspur put spurs to his charger's sides and galloped toward the dragon, his lance at the ready. Arcana saw the dragon's corded belly flash icy-white as the thing reared up housetop high, towering over Quickspur and his tiny lance. Sparks began to shoot sideways from the jaws of the terrible worm, and as he huffed, a spurt of flame danced out, blasting the ground in front of Quickspur's horse's forefeet. The horse squalled and wheeled, Quickspur grabbing onto his neck. Somehow he managed to keep his seat and steer the crazed horse around to attack the dragon from the side but his lance broke against the glittering scales, and the impact sent him flying to the ground where he lay as helpless as an overturned lobster.

Arcana screamed and reined Sable forward. As Quickspur lay there kicking his feet, the dragon went after his horse. It moved lizard-swift for all its bulk and landed on the fleeing animal with splayed forefeet, bearing it to the ground. The great jaws closed on the horse's head, flames licking from its clamped jaws and a terrible smell of burnt flesh filling the air. Arcana reached Quickspur and tried to lever him up, but he was too heavy, and the dragon was returning at an impossibly rapid trot. "Stay down," she called and began to run, racing in a zig-zag pattern as she kept in mind the jetting flames. She was not quite quick enough, however, because a stream of fire spurted between her elbow and ribs, charring her vest and setting her sleeve on fire. But she had reached her goal, a sloping ridge of

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loose rock, larger boulders looming toward the top. She scrambled up it, ignoring the bruises to her ankles and shins. For a moment she crouched there in the sliding talus and beat out the flames on her clothing, while the monster bellowed and shot a stream of flame that crackled just out of reach. Then she began to climb again, almost too hastily, for she fell full length and began to slide down. With an effort that left her trembling with exhaustion, she found firm purchase for her feet and climbed to the top where boulders perched on layers of loose rock.

She put her shoulder behind one and pushed. She felt something break and prayed it was nothing of hers. She toppled herself backward as the whole hillside tore loose and fell to meet the dragon just as he was valiently trying to climb the shaly slope. When she peered over the ridgetop the rock was bearing him down, and then with a muted roar, covered him completely, a dust-haze obscuring the scene.

For a moment she held her breath, thinking to see him digging out, but the largest stones must have done their work. When she returned to Quickspur, she noticed that the squire had taken to his heels. They were never to see him again.

Arcana righted Quickspur as best she could so that he could rise. He enfolded her in metallic embrace until she cried out because of her burns. "For a singer of idle tales you gave that dragon short shrift, but I didn't know if your plan would work. If those rocks hadn't fallen—"

"I whistled them down."

TOWARD EVENING the wind came up blowing rain, so they had to seek shelter in a cave. Arcana was afraid it might be a dragon's den, but Quickspur insisted, so being too tired to argue, she went inside. The entrance led through a narrow-walled tunnel so dark she had to feel her way along damp walls with her hands. In the darkness she suddenly felt herself grabbed and held; a hand grabbed her jaw, twisted her head around, then someone kissed her, full and forcefully on the lips, a tongue warm and wet forcing itself between her jaws. She was struggling when someone ran into her from behind, and suddenly she was fighting nothing.

"What's wrong? Did you hear another dragon?" Quickspur's voice matter-of-factly innocent.

Arcana stumbled forward. *Maybe he knows*, she thought, *or maybe I was wrong. Maybe he likes boys.* But when they reached a larger chamber of the cave, a dry and dragonfree place, Quickspur lay chastely beside her.

"I have heard that Ermintrude is truly lovely—a goddess. How dare that old lecher— My blood boils to think of it. I'll carry her from the castle and be her humble slave forever. By the bye, Arcan, if you compose a lay on our dragonslaying. I hope you, uh, don't mention—"

"I'll sing of your triumph over the worm so that generations will remember it," said Arcana, "but not now. I'm too sore, and too tired."

"I'll recompense you for this, friend," said Quickspur, and the arm about her shoulder was nothing but comradely.

DRAGONSLOND dropped behind them, and they rode into a greener, more wholesome country. They rode up to the door of a country inn, looking like two scarecrows. The proprietor ushered them inside where there was steaming food served by

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red-cheeked peasant girls. "I knew I was missing something," said Quickspur, pinching a round bottom through voluminous homespun skirts. When Arcana gave him a scathing look he said confidingly, "There's something overdainty about you, lad. No offense, but it's time someone helped you become more of a man."

"I'm as much man as I'll ever be, or need to be," said Arcana testily around a rare joint of meat that trickled bloody juices down her chin. "And what of your knightly vows of chivalry—chastity and reverence for womankind."

Quickspur looked wounded. "I have all proper reverence for ladies, beautiful ladies, high-born ladies, but these are tavern wenches. List, while I give you a fatherly word on what to do with one of them."

Quickspur leaned over and whispered in her ear while she listened with narrowed eyes, a corner of her mouth turning up ever so slightly, as if she didn't know whether to laugh or to sneer.

"Oh, they might scream bloody murder, but it's the right thing to do. It's what they want after all." He began to work on his joint of meat, his eyes still on the serving girls.

Washed and wearing new clothes and lying back on a real bed, Arcana was feeling halfway human again and trying to plan a strategy that took into account Ascarius' power and Quickspur's impetuousity and her own cleverness, when the door began to vibrate as a booted foot was swung against it. "What can the dolt want now? If he wants to sleep in here I'll barricade the door. If he wants a song about his manly prowess with serving wenches I'll— Stop, you lout. You're splintering the door. Wait a moment and I'll open— Bodikins! No!"

Quickspur had knocked on the door with his foot because he had a serving girl under each arm. Arcana tried to slam the door but he was already striding inside. "This one's for you." He dropped half his burden on the bed where she dissolved into giggles, hiding her red face with her hands.

"Remember the instructions I gave you, yearling. I'll have you strutting out of here like a gamecock."

"But I don't—"

"Someone must take you in hand, lad." He went out, closing the door securely. She heard the sound of a heavy piece of furniture being dragged against it.

The girl on the bed was now peeking coyly from between her fingers.

"This is going to be very difficult to explain," said Arcana, perching daintily on the edge of the bed. When she saw the flirting expression on the girl's face, she knew that explanation of any kind was impossible, so she untied the thongs of her vest and pulled up her jerkin.

Now that the stunned serving girl was open to explanations, Arcana told her everything and gave her a silver coin for the tale she was to relate to Quickspur on the morrow. "I don't suppose you play cards," said Arcana producing a cunningly painted ivory deck from her waistband. "No? Well, I shall teach you—"

As they rode on their way the next day Arcana often found Quickspur looking at her surreptitiously. As they sat by their fire that night, he said, "That girl told me a story that curled my toes, but spill my spirit, if there's still not something girlified about you. The way the call of nature sends you skittering off behind rock or bush. Overnice, I call it. Mayhap—"

Arcana said no word in protest nor explanation, but rolled up in her cloak

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beside the pink coals of their fire. Wolves reminded them that the night was dark and this country lonely, but not even fear could stave off sleep.

She awoke from a dream in which someone was trying to ravish her. She had confused it somehow with the wolves' howls she had heard the evening before, and she fancied that sharp teeth had worried her neck and shoulders while blunt hands had touched and pawed at her breasts. She drew in her breath in a gasping half-scream and sat up. The thongs of her vest were untied, her jerkin rutched up as if her dream had come real. *No, I only struggled so in my dream to dislodge my clothing. Such a thing is nonsense* (or magic, insinuated a distant voice in her mind which she conveniently ignored). As she put her hand on her neck, she felt the stinging as of salt in a wound. When she looked at her hand there was a dull red smudge of blood on it. Beside where she slept in the moist earth was left, more a signature than a true spoor, one clear imprint of a wolf's paw. She erased it quickly with her hand.

GREEN LAND began to give way to black rock, scarps and canyons shelving ever upward, and at last they saw, bathed in a blue luminous haze that made it seem to float, Ascarius' keep set on a pinnacle of dull black rock. Sunlight drew streaks of light along its walls as if by some magic, the material had become vitrified. Only a narrow trail spiraled upward, easily defended, yet no defender appeared and they climbed with impunity, wind licking at their hair and the manes of the horses.

"Don't you have the feeling that the castle rises even as we climb toward it?" asked Quicksupr.

"Yea, and looking down seems to confirm it. The ground is leagues away now. Perhaps we were rash—"

Hard fingers began to tickle her, and she struggled to be free of them and almost fell out of Sable's saddle and all that vast way to the ground. The same invisible hands kept her from falling and straightened her in the saddle. A moist whisper in her ear began to make obscene suggestions.

Another voice speaking from the air beside them interrupted. "Welcome to my domain. It has been most amusing, watching your futile struggles to arrive here, and there will be more festivities to come, I promise." Arcana saw light like blue needles surround Quickspur, his horse, shooting from Sable's bowed neck, from the fingers of her hands. And she could not move. Though her perceptions still seemed to work, she felt as if time had stopped for her, the wind frozen against her face. She knew that, if Ascarius chose, he could keep them thus for always, as the daystar dimmed to a pitted fire-coal, as the cliffs eroded, lost their diamond edges and collapsed into soft black earth. As she was possessed by this knowledge, she felt herself floating airy as a bubble (and as fragile). She didn't know about Quickspur, for her perceptions were fading as she floated upward, so lightly as if she would bump gently against the translucent blue porcelain of sky.

The floating sensation was gone, and she felt immensely heavy at first, but was immediately glad to have her senses, her mind and her body returned to her. She was sitting in a large chair, the arms of which were carved (or so she thought) in the likeness of serpents. As she watched, the coils twitched and writhed, twining

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about her arms. Arcarius was sitting in a companion chair (the arms static) opposite her, looking much as he had in the scrying glass, except immensely pleased with himself. His fingers fumbled in air for a moment as if seeking something lost in a pouch, and he retrieved a heavy golden goblet. "Drink this," he said, "a draught of reviving wine." When she looked down at her hands he made another gesture so rapidly his fingers seemed to blur and the serpents straightened into chair arms again. To gain time she sipped the wine slowly and tried to engage the sorcerer in conversation.

"Foolish, foolish. You should have realized when I pirated your demon that my magic is superior to yours. Oh we shall have some good games together, games of cat and mouse, of falcon and pigeon."

"I wish you'd call off your bedamned incubus. I can still feel him hovering around, breathing on me."

"Oh, he's taken quite an interest in his work. He finds you very exciting."

"All things considered, I can't say I'm flattered." She made a gesture as if to remove something repellent, something clinging.

"We mustn't spoil his diversion."

"At least you could release Quickspur. He won't afford you amy amusement."

"On the contrary. I'm sure he will be vastly entertaining on the field of combat." He waved his hand and an armored knight strode into the room, his joints creaking maddeningly. But there was something wrong about the sound, the way he moved. Suddenly the visor flipped up with a clang, opening upon empty air. "I ween he will find this a true test of his knighthood. Unfortunately, the end of the tourney is in no doubt; he'll find no vulnerable spot in this perfect knight." The suit stalked out, inhabited by nothing more than an implacable sense of purpose.

"What of Ermintrude? She's done nothing to cause harm."

"Oh no, nothing to cause harm. Oh no." A wild look came into the magician's eyes. "She's securely behind walls and will stay so. I will admit I blundered in bringing her here, but how was I to know? Oh she's quite safe, quite safe. And now, I give you the freedom of my castle. Unfortunately, it's not untenanted, in fact, it's crowded, with my demons." He made himself disappear, from the feet up, in a leisurely way that made Arcana fume with jealousy. Some day she might have learned to do that, if she hadn't gone out will he nill he, like a certain hotheaded knight.

No sooner was Ascarius gone than she felt a body pressing against her own, lips set delicately, lingeringly, against her throat and clever fingers working at the fastenings of her clothing. The hands were clinging and pervasive; she felt a far-off languour stealing toward her. When she closed her eyes, the body felt solid enough. Eyes squeezed shut, she kicked. And was rewarded by solid connection with flesh and bone and a muffled grunt of pain. He had been too involved in his games to dematerialize. Still in darkness, she located the clinging, stroking hands, caught them by solid wrists and tore them from her, pushing herself away in a stumbling run. Once into the corridor she ran to more purpose, hearing hollow footsteps pursuing.

Along the passageway there was a narrow, doorless opening; she almost missed it in her flight. Wheeling around she fled into it and almost found herself falling upward against a

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flight of naked stone steps that led steeply and crookedly upward.

"If there's a donjon above, that may be where he's imprisoned Ermintrude." She climbed. This seemed to be an odd time to be thinking of rescuing someone else, but her head buzzed and sputtered and she found it hard to think logically. There had been a note of . . . something . . . in Ascarius' voice when he spoke of the Demoiselle, and he had said she was "safely" imprisoned. She fetched up against a great wooden door banded in metal. A tiny slot at eyelevel allowed her to peer inside. She saw a girl of pale, ethereal beauty, tight golden ringlets standing around her head in a filmy halo, her dress of yellow silk drooping petal-like around her as she sat, chin on fist, beside a barred window. One heavy wooden bar held the door, and Arcana tried to force it upward. At last she worked it free, worrying that her strength appeared to be waning and wondering why she should feel so drained and listless.

As she entered the cell, Ermintrude looked up out of immense glassy blue eyes. "Who are you, Good Sir?"

"I've come to release you."

"Oh bless you." Her eyes shimmered, magnified by tears. "I don't know why Ascarius was so mean to lock me up here in this cold metal place when he knows I'm too weak and helpless to do him any harm. I was as nice to him as I knew how to be, both to him and to that nice friend of his that nobody can see; well, this is how he treats me."

Arcana looked around and saw that indeed the prison was sheathed in plates of lead. She couldn't imagine why, but it was getting harder for her to link one thought with another.

"I thank you prettily, Good Young Sir. Though I had waited and hoped that a gallant knight—no matter." She made a little curtsey.

"There is a knight below," said Arcana, "who came to rescue you."

"How *exciting!*" She put her hands together in front of her face.

"Come, we'll search for him together." Arcana ran her hand across her eyes for she had gone through a mesh of cobwebs and her vision was burning and blurring. Odd, but there were no strands of cobweb there. "Drugged wine!" she shouted aloud. "For sooth, I am a very babe in Ascarius' sight." Ermintrude was descending the staircase, a dollop of sunlight, growing larger, growing smaller. Arcana teetered at the top of the stairs and would have gone toppling over except that someone caught her and swung her up, one arm under her shoulders, one under her knees. Surefootedly he descended the stairs. "Safe," she thought and her eyes opened. No one carried her; she floated on empty air like a conjurer's trick. She could see no face but that didn't stop her from tearing it with her nails. There was a stifled yelp, and with a jolt, she found herself sitting on the floor. She scrambled to her feet and began to run, but it was in the way one runs in dreams, drenched in fear-sweat over something, one knows not what, that always pursues, and feet sliding through leaden sliminess, trying one's best to run, but going nowhere.

She found herself running more freely and shouted in exhilaration. The walls of the passage narrowed and burned with a velvet violet light. She burst through into noonday, feeling light as air and unencumbered, floating upward, but why—? She stopped, looked backward (and

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downward) in her flight. She became confused to see her heavy earthen body, lying in a crumpled posture, the mouth slackly open, the eyes closed. But why such a clumsy body of dull earth-bound hues when she saw herself milky pale and filled with corruscating light of rainbow color. She was so light she could bound above the trees. She looked more closely as she passed over their branching tops, but they were not tree-like at all, but had a cauliflower texture and were dusted with a glistening greenish powder that gave them a fungoid appearance.

Below, something invisible was lifting the body and bearing it away. She would have thought she had died except that the mouth and hands moved in drunken protest. And she could feel herself (when she concentrated on it) being carried. So she was not dead, only separated. And she remembered being in this state once before while experimenting with a potion she had read of in a scroll half-eaten by worms. Ascarius had played the fool this time, for she was in demonland and free of her clinging earth-shape, but not totally free, for she could feel herself being lowered to the softness of a bed.

She seemed to need no direction in this land where fungoid trees rose in minutes, collapsing as rapidly, falling in upon themselves with a gust of shining green powder, beneath an immense red sun that stood always at noon, casting down a shadowless light. She met a shape like a wavering pillar of smoke. "Arcana, I never thought to see you again."

"Ungratefulness, I call it," she said, hovering over him, an opalescent light now and again sending out a streamer of anger.

The smokewisp shrugged, though without shoulders it was hard to recognize the gesture. "How could I help it? His magic overshadows yours. Even out of the body when you meet him mind to mind, he will surely defeat you."

In this shadowless land a dim coolness slid over them and looking above Arcana saw a great black cloud gathering, lightnings playing along its flanks.

In the real world her clothes were being removed garment by garment, invisible hands gloating over the bare flesh. She felt herself struggle weakly, held in the jesses of the drug, then she shrugged it off her consciousness as a horse twitches away a fly.

Ascarius was speaking from the cloud, "I did not know you could go out of the body with such facility. I meant only to allow my demon a little pleasure. I would have watched with interest. But perhaps this is better—mind against mind, demon against demons." The innards of the cloud swirled as if it were birthing a tornado. "Who? How? Don't look at me so out of those cow eyes. Stop making them go so blank, and for the gods' sakes suck in that pouting rosy little lip."

"It's the thing," said the Demon.

"Thing?" said Arcana with a dawning awareness.

"I don't know what it is, really, a geas, perhaps. It is a terrible blank chaos that works to suck up Ascarius' power like a sponge."

"Come now, Child, I'm not really an 'old meanie.' Let me return you to your tower room. Don't dart about so!"

Arcana shot upward into the center of the thundercloud. Mind clashed against mind, and she felt an alien chill, tasting the length of his life, the *otherness* of it. Fear flashed and anger rumbled, and Arcana felt his wrath

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strike her like acid rain, burning, pitting, scarring, so that she knew after this battle she would be irrevocably changed.

The demon's lips made snail-tracks across her breasts, his hands ran like fiery silk along her thighs. Chemically cocooned in anger and pleasure, she could only move as in a bad dream.

Her mind felt Ascarius' death grip weaken, and she reaffirmed her own more solidly. "Truce!" he called then. "You yellow-headed witch, I am destroyed!"

Arcana did not dare trust him in a truce, not when his power so overtowered her own. Her teeth were on his windpipe and she could not let go.

"Treachery!" he said in the thinnest of wind sounds, for he was dispersing, boiling, disappearing, and the red sun was burning through his grimy tatters.

Arcana's Demon backed away from the scarlet helix that had been coiling around and through him, and watched it, too, disappear. She and the Demon did a floating, bounding dance of joy. Then she remembered herself: "The incubus!"

"We can dispel him now," suggested the Demon.

"We can't leave me in a state like that," said Arcana. "No, we'll have to let him finish, and—"

Like a shapeless bird she dived downward, through enclosing gloom, through the violet fires, entering with a wrenching click in time to experience the penultimate madness, the violent release, the floating warmth.

AWAKENING LATER, all in one piece, she watched light and shadow moving on the ceiling. She was alone, the incubus dispersed. She began to collect things that were scattered, her cast-aside clothing littering the floor. She collected Ermintrude who was still asking what had happened to the eccentric old granther with the fetching eyes. Unfortunately, or fortunately (who ever knew?) Ermintrude's wits were permanently fled to the four winds and could never be gathered. They went out into the courtyard, fearful that Quickspur's limbs would be what must needs be gathered next. He lay on the cobbles, as one dead, his armor sorely dented, but upon surveying the scene, Arcana saw lying here and there the component parts of Ascarius' perfect knight. Quickspur sat up suddenly, pushing up his visor. "He wasn't human, but I kept bashing away at him till one part fell off and then another. He was a hell of a fighting man, I thought, til I found out there wasn't anyone in there at all, just a suit of armor that walked like a man."

At that point he saw Ermintrude, her small hands clasped in adoration and the most apalling blankness in her blank blue eyes. "My lady," he intoned, rising only to kneel to her feet. He gingerly picked up the hem of her skirt and pressed it to his lips. "I know I am all unworthy to touch a hair on your lovely head or to beg a smile from your pearl-like teeth, but if you'll allow it, I'll return you to your father, defending you to the death, if need be."

ARCANA sat in a dank chamber of the catacombs where Ascarius practiced his sorcery. She banged the lute and chanted in a nasal voice. "Oh my heart is laden, Oh my heart is full of—"

"Oh my ears are broken," echoed a still small voice above the faded pentagram that Ascarius had chalked on the floor. "Fair Demoiselle, is your heart truly broken?"

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She felt for it, as to check an it were still pumping. "I think not. But to think that Quickspur—that lout will depart not even knowing that I am a woman and that I lay next to him all those nights we searched so long. If I told him now it would naught but scare him out of his iron pants. Besides, he has eyes for her only."

"Her eyes are mirrors in which he sees himself as he wishes to be seen. Have you any sorceries as strong as that?"

She twanged the lute at him, snapping a string that curled up in a discordant sound. "That incubus—he couldn't have been you by any chance?"

Muted retching sounds.

"I was wondering, but— Good, we shall pack up all Ascarius' books, gredients and magicks. I will learn all that he knew, and then—"

"You will attempt to rule the world," said the Demon approvingly. "To control the ocean tides and the four winds."

"I was thinking more of summoning the incubus."

The Demon reeled out pale tentacles of angry smoke as she dived behind a workbench, her sardonic laughter hanging demonlike in empty air.

—JANET FOX

Another Burnt-Out Case (cont. from page 57)

stand the extortion scheme, though I do not of course condone it," he said. "What I do not understand is why you contrived to murder your employee, Big Tiny."

"Love," I said.

"Love?"

"Of dear Emma," I said. I turned to face her small, flawless self. "You never suspected how great was my reverence for your beauty, Little Tiny—how beatific and pure was my love."

Curiously, she did not seem particularly surprised by my confession of motive; none of them did except Feuer.

"I really do love you," I said. "All thirty pounds and three feet of you."

"Thirty pounds and three feet?" Feuer said.

"Oh yes," the Snare Drum said. Or perhaps it was the Amazing Pyromaniac. "We have known all along of Webb's delusion, and have humored him because he was our employer and, we thought, our friend. Now, naturally, the masquerade cannot be continued."

"Delusion?" I said. "Masquerade?"

"Webb," one of them said, "Webb, Big Tiny and Little Tiny each stand approximately six and a half feet tall and weigh in the neighborhood of two hundred and seventy-five pounds. They are and always have been our Strong Man and Strong Lady."

"Really?" I said. "I thought they were midgets."

They took me away.

—BILL PRONZINI & BARRY MALZBERG

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LEASEHOLD

Are we property? And if so, whose?

WALLACE WEST

Illustrated by RICHARD OLSEN

"RIDICULOUS!" Claudia sniffed as she tossed aside a copy of Charles Fort's *Lo*.

"What now, my love?" I stopped romping with Taxi to switch off the short wave radio which had been yammering about tax increases, the threatened general strike and how many of the enemy had been killed in Indonesia and Brazil.

"Fort's theory that the world is owned; that we are being pushed around in the dark by superior . . . things."

"What's so ridiculous about that?" I scratched Taxi between his ears as he demanded. "This sausage hound knows he owns us."

"He doesn't make us take pot shots at the neighbors though." Claudia's piquant face was dead serious. "I mean that, if we really had an owner, she wouldn't . . . "

"She?"

"Of course. The only possible owner is Gaea, the Earth Mother, or her descendants. All the Earth Mothers were conservationists. They wouldn't sit idly by and let a valuable property go to pot."

"Maybe Mama Gaea has gone on a cruise or moved away."

"Nuh-uh." My wife, who won her Ph.D. with a thesis on the finer points of mythology, picked up a partially-hooked rug on which she works when the spirit moves her and surveyed, with a vague distaste, the younger gods at play on Mount Olympus. "It isn't quite thataway. Even as an absentee landlady, Gaea would have left an overseer behind; someone who wouldn't tolerate automobile graveyards, pollution, black-on-white power struggles, the population explosion or the H-bomb."

"Maybe she leased the old home place." I sat up in the hammock and debated whether it was late enough to mix a shaker of Martinis. "Back in the Age of Pericles, let's say . . . "

" . . . when earth and its peoples were in tip-top condition!" Claudia's green eyes began to sparkle as they do whenever we bat a story idea between us. "Things have been on the skids ever since."

"So now the lessee has wrecked the property and wants out." I glanced at my typewriter, hooded in a corner of the library. "Maybe . . . "

"Maybe she's trying to break the lease?"

"Gaea?"

"No, stupid. The lessee! She's wrung all the misery, or whatever she wants, out of us poor humans. Since the beginning of the Balkan Wars she and her pals have been throwing one big lease-breaking party. On this morning's news programs you could hear the furniture smash almost."

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"So the lessee's a female too?"

"Naturally. The nutty things that keep happening in Peking, Buenos Aires, Podunk and Washington show bitch psychology at work."

"Who, then?"

Claudia put her hands between her pretty knees, looked out across our private piece of ocean and the Bahamian cays that dot it, and thought deeply. At last she said:

"If we're right in thinking the lease was signed long ago—and we must be right because things have gone from bad to worse ever since Greek democracy cracked up in the Peloponnesian Wars—there are only a few logical candidates for lessee."

"Wouldn't they hide behind a front of some kind?"

"Exactly. They'd set up a foundation or corporation to do their dirty work; some geopolitical management group of the type popularized by that Nazi major general Karl Haushofer."

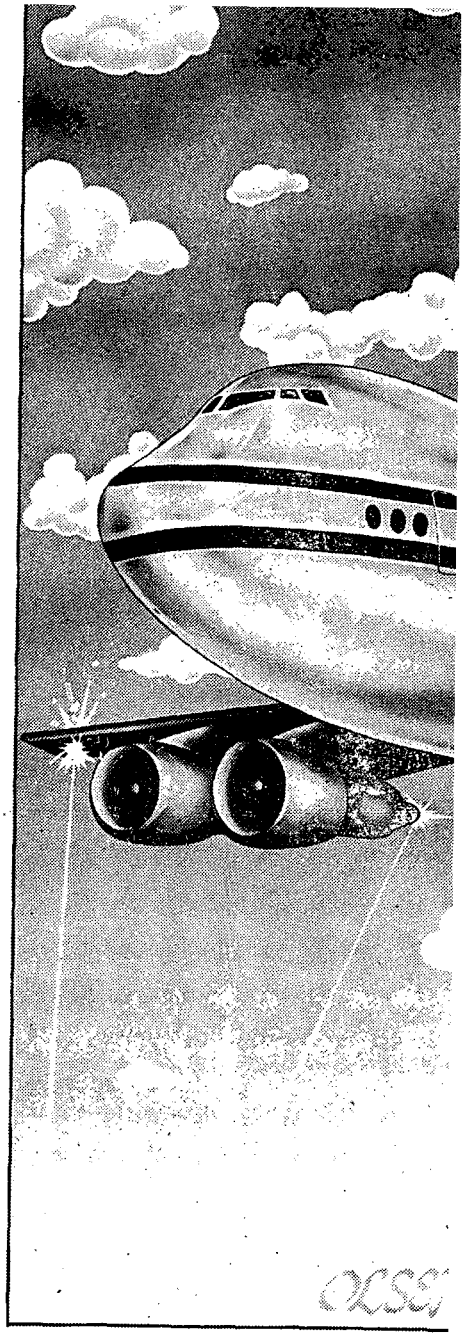
"The man who invented Lebensraum?"

"He's the one. If we could get a line on some hush-hush outfit like that we'd have a clue to the whole mess."

"Not a bad story idea. Now, if I can think up a swords-and-sorcery plot." Sadly I relinquished the Martinis and took down Gayley's *Classic Myths* from a shelf.

"Story idea?" Claudia laughed in my face. "Life is real. Life is earnest, my dear mate. We're onto something big. Help me get our gear packed. We're taking the next plane for the States."

THEY WOULDN'T let us land near Washington. Street fighting had broken out again and a large section of Northwest was burning. Our pilot said we would go on to New York "for



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technical reasons." (As he was speaking one of those reasons became apparent as a tatting of machine gun bullet holes in our left wing.)

Leaking fuel like crazy, we managed to reach Kennedy. An ambulance and three fire engines escorted us down the runway there. An airline official met us on the ramp. Almost in tears, he apologized for "any inconvenience you may have suffered."

"It's better than being hijacked," Claudia soothed him.

"Now what, my love?" I asked once more when we were safe in a hotel room. "Look in the Yellow Pages for a Geopolitical Management Corp?"

"Let's call on H. G. at Hayden-Stone. I bet what we're after is listed on the Big Board."

H. G. Silverwater, our friend and broker of 25 years or more, decided that the International Management Corporation, widely known only as IMC, best fitted out specifications.

"It's big-big. It appears to do nothing. And its Board of Directors reads like a page from the Blue Book," chuckled that slim and handsome white-haired Greco-Egyptian. "And it's holding its annual meeting in New York next week."

"Could we attend that meeting?" I asked.

"Maybe, if you know how to make yourselves invisible. They're worse than the FBI for checking credentials."

"Could we buy a share of stock apiece?"

"None has been traded since I can remember. Why the great interest?"

We told him about our hunch.

H. G. didn't laugh. Instead he said "Hmmm!" Then, after a long pause. "Among my wealthiest clients are Mr. And Mrs. John Ducas of Athens. Mrs. Ducas inherited a block of IMC, from her great grandmother as I recall. They don't attend annual meetings unless they have to. I send in their proxies, of course, and the secretary casts their votes. You might impersonate them . . . "

"We could say our round-the-world cruise was delayed in New York and that we just dropped in to be sociable," Claudia proposed.

"The Ducases aren't well known on this side of the Atlantic." H. G. got up from his huge desk and stared out at the once-busy New York harbor. "You might get away with it but it will be risky."

"We'll chance it," I decided. (I decided?) "Where and when is the meeting?"

"Ten a.m., Thursday, in the Board Room of the IMC Building at 60th and Madison. You'll be surprised."

"We'll need some Beautiful People clothes," said Claudia. "Goodie! A shopping spree. Ducas? A fine old Greek name. Athens? Fine old Greek city. How about something archaic but veddy, veddy new?"

"A hobble skirt," suggested the broker with a twinkle in his black eyes. "They're making a comeback. Saks has a windowful."

"And, for my worser half?"

"Morning dress, I suggest. Pinstripe trousers. Wing tie."

"And a jeweled leash for Taxi!" She clapped her hands.

"Surely you're not taking the pooch into such august company," I protested.

"Why not? We need protection."

WE *were* surprised. The IMC Building, a seven-story brownstone squeezed between skyscrapers, obviously was a Stanford White original. Its lobby was panelled in honey-colored, nearly-edible knotty pine,

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sparsely decorated with Currier & Ives prints, also originals. A bronze placque beside the automatic elevator announced:

United States and Canadian Division .....Second Floor.
Latin American Division ....Third Floor.
African Division ... Fourth Floor.
European Division .. Fifth Floor.
Asiatic Division ..... Sixth Floor.
International Offices and Board Room .....Seventh Floor.

The elevator boasted a love seat and oriental rug.

In the gothic seventh floor reception room pretty maids in crisp white uniforms presented silver trays bearing coffee and croissants.

"Something odd here," Claudia murmured between sips and nibbles. "The people. I can't . . . I mean I cawn't place 'em."

"Caprine?" I was watching a little old man with a white goatee and knavish eyes who had just pinched a maid.

"Feline? Look at that chit in nothing but a wide belt and T-shirt. The police should run her in!"

"Or vulpine?" As a fellow with a face like a fox passed by.

I was studying others of the hundred or so stockholders present when one of those concerted movements began. We let ourselves be swept through the Board Room door. Inside, a clerk was so overwhelmed by the sudden crush that she didn't notice Taxi and let us pass unquestioned.

We took seats near the door and looked around. We were in a small Greek temple, complete in every detail. In one crumbling niche a movie screen had been installed. In another was an exquisite statue of Apollo, for Pete's sake!

"Dismantled and crated in Athens," Claudia whispered. "Re-assembled here, a la a William Randolph Hearst castle. So this is how the other millionth lives. Wow!"

The oldster with the goatee hopped up on a platform to the right of the sun god's niche and struggled with a microphone. That devil's device emitted only whines and howls until a technician rushed in from the control room next door and adjusted it.

"I must apologize for this new equipment, fellow shareholders," piped Grandpa. "Since not all of our Board members speak English it was felt that a translator would be helpful. Notice the small box at the center of this table. Each Director will be given a jack cord, one end of which plugs into his ear, the other into the box. Translators in the control booth will re-phrase the proceedings in half a dozen languages, as is done at United Nations. Listeners can select that with which they are most familiar.

"As most of you know . . ." Did his fierce little eyes rest on us for an instant? "As most of you know, I am your corporation's secretary. The start of this meeting will be delayed slightly pending arrival of our honorable President and Vice President. They are held up by a magnificent smog bank over Kennedy Airport. I trust that nobody here objects to air pollution?" He tittered.

"Not so long as we have our health," something brayed from the center of the room. The shareholders rocked with laughter. Claudia lifted one eyebrow. Taxi sneezed.

"I will fill the time until their arrival by introducing our Board members though most of you already are acquainted with them." Again those eyes drifted in our direction. "Gen-

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tlemen, please come up and take seats as I call your names."

As he droned through the roll call one plump, well-tailored figure after another rose, bowed, was presented with a cord, took his place at the table and plugged in. There was Herr Doktor Johann Ley, M. Jacques Mitterand, Count Horthy, Señor Fulano, Comrade Tou Che . . . Eventually twelve men from as many nations were hooked to the translator like telephone operators. Some were familiar as billionaires, some bore ancient titles, some held high rank as business men or generals.

"I've got it. I've got it!" Claudia crooned. "Our word is 'porcine'. Every director looks like a manicured prize pig on exhibit at the state fair. Notice their snouty noses, their glassy round eyes, their bulges in all the proper places."

"Stockholders look like menagerie exhibits too," I agreed. "That's an old setting hen across the aisle. She'll cackle soon."

When he finished his introductions, the secretary studied us briefly once more. We ignored him and joined in a rising round of applause for the Board.

The reception room doors swung wide while we were still applauding. Down the center aisle, as though pacing to the flourish of French horns, moved two really Beautiful People. One was a blonde in gold lamé who resembled, but outshone, Garbo in her prime. The other was a tall, lean man in white who resembled Lucifer . . . black eyes, black hair, paper-white skin and thin sensuous lips.

As they passed us, Taxi rose as though drawn by wires. The brown fur along his spine bristled. He growled deep in his throat.

The man slowed and glanced sidewise. Those thin lips curled. And he snarled back!

"Did you see him?" I gripped Claudia's wrist.

"No. I only saw *her*." My wife's teeth were chattering. "That's Circe, 'golden-haired daughter of the Sun'. No wonder these people look like animals. She's changed them into animals. We'll be transformed too, unless we get out of here fast."

I shushed her as an old horse next to us stared annoyance at our whispering. I should have smiled at Claudia's fantastic notion but, somehow, I didn't feel the least bit amused.

While the audience continued to stand the golden . . . demi-goddess, was she? . . . greeted the secretary and listened to some urgent message. She then turned and gave sharp directions to the man in white. He strode to the edge of the platform and held up a hand for silence.

"Gentlemen Directors," he cried in a voice of distant thunder, "there are spies among us. Bar the doors and deal with them!"

The Board members rose as one. The plugs they jerked from their ears and the translator box made little crackling noises that covered me with gooseflesh. Holding the black jack cords stiffly outstretched before them, they advanced, like sleepwalkers, toward the spot where we had . . . so recently . . . been standing.

We just made it through bronze doors leading to the reception room before they were slammed shut. We punched the elevator button and backed against the elevator door.

Grunting and squealing, the Directors fought to be the first to strangle us. Taxi did yeoman duty among their fat ankles. I swung a chair at their fat heads. Claudia poked their fat

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stomachs with the point of a parasol she had bought to go with her skirt.

Somehow we held those drooling snouts, popping eyes and snaking cords at bay until the elevator door slid open behind us; until, with the help of a flung love seat, I managed to jam it shut. Moments later we were safe among the crowds on Mad Avenue.

"Goodness," panted my darling as she powdered her tip-tilted nose. "Hobble skirts will never come back. They're too awkward to fight in."

We had luncheon with H. G. at his favorite Inn of the Twelve Gods atop New York's tallest skyscraper.

"Others have made your deductions about Circe and a leasehold," the spry, white-haired broker told us grimly. "None of them did much about it. Some disappeared. Some were killed. Some were changed. Odysseus looked the other way, as was his custom, although I did my . . . " H. G. choked on the onion in his Gibson. " . . . although I can't blame him. Circe, dear girl, offers a certain robust charm on occasion."

"Sexy cow!" Claudia sniffed. "And I detest being strangled at. Will you help us put a spoke in her . . . up her . . . "

"A fly in her potion sounds better," I hastened to suggest.

"Or, better yet, a stake through her wicked heart. Ugh! Will you, H. G?"

"But, Claudia, how *can* I help?" sighed the broker. "Circe and her boy friend run IMC because they control more than half of its stock. And IMC, with its affiliates . . . Cosa Nostra, various military juntas and the Klan, among others . . . is out to milk and strip its human cattle. Given those conditions, what can anyone do?"

"What about a proxie fight?" I asked. "Are all of the stockholders happy with those conditions?"

"Perhaps not." He nibbled a canape. "No, definitely not. But they've been licked so often they've lost hope. Also, the three principal minority holders are old ladies."

"Widows or orphans?" This from Claudia.

"Both, in a manner of speaking. In addition, two are senile and the third is highly, shall we say, volatile."

"Like me," said Claudia. "When can we start?"

"Start where?" H. G. blinked.

"For the nursing home where your little old ladies are holed up. Or would you prefer to carry a message from us to them?"

"Sorry. No messenger service. It's too strenuous at my age. I'll give you directions, though, and letters of introduction."

"And a sprig or two of Moly to protect us from Circe's spells?"

"So you've guessed my real identity after all these years?" He smiled at her fondly.

"I guessed it the first time we met," she twinkled back. "H. G. is the chemical symbol for Mercury, your other alias. You're Hermes, the only one of the Olumpian gods who ever lifted a finger to help the human race."

"Thank you, Claudia. Certainly you'll carry plenty of Moly. And now . . . " as a waiter deigned to approach. "What would you like to eat? I recommend the Greek salad."

THE WEEKEND found us flown to Athens and driving a Hertz-Mercedes across the sun-drenched plains of Thessaly. The nagging thought that we were on a wild goose chase evaporated in this eroded land of goat herds, tall white clouds, ox carts and olive groves.

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"This is yesterday." I thought aloud.

"Or 1984," Claudia was thinking of the tussle we had had with the Junta's tourist office before we were let loose without a "guide".

"There's Mount Othrys where the elder gods . . . the Titans . . . ruled until they were overthrown by Zeus and their other hippie children," Claudia mused. "Some accounts say the Titans still are imprisoned deep inside the mountain. A road leads to the summit." She traced it on our Michelon map with a slim finger. "And here on the margin is mention of the Titantic Nursing Home. It's located on the site of an ancient temple or palace . . . You turn right here."

A handsome, hard-faced woman in the home's office regarded us warily and introduced herself as Mrs. Aegeus.

"Not *Medea* Aegeus, the famous sorceress? Claudia cried as if she had met an old friend.

"*Ex*-sorceress!" The voice was icy. "What do you want?"

"We've come to visit Gaea, Rhea, Cybele and Persephone, deary."

"Do you take me for a fool? Let me see your passports."

I handed her one of H. G.'s letters of introduction instead.

"You may see them, but only for half an hour," a different Medea spoke. "The elder gods are pretty far gone and need their rest. Leave your dog here. Otherwise he's sure to be eaten."

She led us first through what she explained were the Achean and Dorian corridors of the home's Olympian Wing. They contained pleasant living quarters, recreation areas and dining halls. For oldsters, the patients were well groomed and appeared reasonably content. Claudia recognized a few of them and wanted to stop and chat.

"Interviews strictly forbidden," Medea rasped as she shooed us onward. "Junta's orders. The Greek Church still fears these Olympians."

Soon we plunged into a corridor that burrowed beneath the mountain. Here a Spartan simplicity prevailed. There was a musty odor everywhere. Peeling paint hung from ancient walls. Decrepit patients peered at us around door posts. Someone unseen strummed a lyre and sang dolefully. Mangy cats, rats and unidentifiable vermin skittered.

"This is the original Mycenaean Wing." Medea told us in an apologetic tone. "Now that Greek tourism is a thing of the past the Junta says it hasn't enough funds to maintain this part of the home properly."

"Who do you keep here?" I puzzled. "I've read my Homer, of course, but I don't recall that he mentioned Mount Othrys or the Titans."

"Naturally," the ex-sorceress snapped. "Homer was a snob. He wrote only to please the Archaeans and Dorians who had just conquered Greece. The defeated Mycenaeans had ruled from Crete. The newcomers despised them. That's why the word 'cretin' was coined for them.

"Of course the doctors say all the cases kept in this wing are incurably senile." Her black eyes blazed with anger. "If only they could die or even fade away."

"Struldrugs, eh?" Claudia guessed.

"How did you know?"

"I've read my *Gulliver's Travels* and . . . " Claudia broke off to stare at the toothless wreck of a giant. Chained against a wall of his dark cell he was waiting, with massive head thrown back, for some obscene attack.

"Prom! For heaven's sake!" All harshness gone, Medea rushed into

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the room. jerked the rusty chains from their hooks and led the emaciated creature to its pallet on the floor. "You promised not to immolate yourself any more."

"But my eagle." The answer came as a faint rumble. "It's hungry."

"Nonsense. I fed it three snakes and a pigeon this very morning."

"That's not right. my dear. though you mean well. It's my punishment for bringing fire to mankind . . . And his reward. You'll let him peck me tomorrow. won't you? Mankind's worth a lacerated liver."

"Of course. Prom." she soothed. "Of course it is. Now you get some sleep.

"Poor Prometheus." Medea sighed as we resumed our pilgrimage. "Personally. I don't think humans, demigods or even gods, are worth a lacerated finger."

"Now you sound more like the girl who murdered her brother. her children and her ex-husband's wife." Claudia beamed.

"They all had it coming to them." Medea snapped.

"Tell me. my dear. what do you think of Circe?"

"She's a beautiful retarded child. She dotes on doing evil. She's like Loki of the Norsemen or Manabus of the Algonquians. Why?"

"We're trying to pull her teeth." I said.

"And we need your help. Medea darling." added my wife.

"I haven't cast a decent spell in ages. But . . . all right. I'll do what I can for you. I've never forgotten that. when Jason and I visited her castle. she took him out of my bed and into hers before you could say 'Aphrodite'."

To our right there came a clamor as though a carload of old iron had overturned. Sulphurous smoke eddied from an alcove.

"That's Gilgamesh fighting his dragon." Medea groaned. "Earth's oldest elder god. and the spryest. Maybe he's its ultimate redeemer."

"Here we are." She indicated a windowless chamber where shadows moved. "The home of my three dear ladies. Gaea. Rhea and Cybele who is sometimes called Demeter."

"Where is Persephone?" Claudia wondered.

"My daughter finds it more comfortable in hell than in this drafty place." grumbled a gaunt yet strangely beautiful woman dressed in green robes who appeared in the doorway. "I am Cybele. What brings you here? We've had no visitors since a writer named Cabell stopped by a good half century ago.

"Mother." she called after we had introduced ourselves. "More Americans to see us. Wake granny."

"Gaea is awake." answered the wisp of a voice. "What is wanted of the Earth Mother?"

"We've come about Circe's lease." Claudia entered the crypt and knelt at the feet of an old woman who held an unutterably ancient crone on her lap. "Circe's bent on destroying both earth and the human race. Mother Gaea. Help us to destroy *her*."

"Destroy Circe?" The creature came wide awake. Her agate eyes glittered with intelligence as she sat up on her daughter Rhea's broad knee. "Better witches than you have tried it and failed. Ask Medea. Heh. Heh. Heh. How do you propose to go about it?"

"Do you know about the International Management Corporation?" I asked.

"Know about it?" She was outraged. "Hermes and I organized the

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awful thing ages ago when the burden of making humans behave properly got too much for me."

The goddess I was startled to note, looked exactly like a shrewd Irish biddy. She *is* an Irish biddy was my next thought. She hails from that far time when Europe's first settlers, the Celts . . . the *Gaels* . . . were ruled by a matriarchy.

"If we could control a majority of IMC's stock, Mother, we could throw the corporation into receivership and . . . " I stammered to a halt.

"Weell now! Gaea tottered to her feet and draped her green nightgown around her like a royal robe. "That's the first sensible suggestion I've heard since the pigs ate grandma. Go on."

"We need to know who are IMC's largest shareholders."

"Rhea, Cybele, Persephone and I hold a third of the stock, as joint tenants with right of survivorship. Circe took a third. One-fourth was snapped up by the Olympians but they're so improvident they've probably sold it long ago. Then, thinking to keep any one of those holders from dominating corporate affairs, I got what I thought was the bright idea of putting the final eight and a third per cent in the name of Cerberus, old Charon's three-headed dog. Dogs can't vote, I figured. What a mistake that was!" Gaea wrung her hands and wept rheumy tears. "Circe's spells work both ways."

"So that's the setup," I said. "With H. G.'s help we ought to be able to upset Circe's cart of golden apples."

"Oh, I've already figured out a way to do that," my wife began. Then her voice rose to a shriek: "Rhea! Catch Gaea. She's fainted."

"Just gone back to sleep," mooed Earth Mother II as she supported the eldest goddess in great round arms and restored her to her lap. "The poor dear is not used to so much excitement. Please go."

"Not before we decide who should be received for IMC." This from Medea who had been standing, forgotten, in the doorway.

"How about you?" Claudia was ecstatic. "You'd overawe everyone, dashing about in your golden chariot drawn by lions."

"Tangle with Circe, face to face? Never! I'd rather deal with Medusa. Hermes might take the job . . . Or Cybele."

"I'd begin by castrating the Board of Directors in the most painful manner possible," gritted Earth Mother III.

"We're forgetting another candidate," said Claudia, looking ill. "Apollo might be able to make his daughter behave."

"No!" Gaea's eyes remained closed but she spoke clearly. "Besides fathering the unspeakable Circe, Apollo robbed me of my oracle at Delphi. My worshippers called the oracle 'Gaea's navel'. I won't repeat what it was called after Apollo took over. Vote our proxies for Hermes. Now go away. Gaea is sleepy." She yawned prodigiously, as did her daughter and granddaughter.

"May I have a word with you alone, Medea?" Claudia asked when we were back in the office of the home. "It's about Prometheus."

UPON OUR RETURN to Athens we found that fighting among Moslems, Jews and Christians had blazed up all around the Mediterranean. Luckily, the North Polar route back to the States remained open.

The Washington riots had spread to New York by the time we got back. Large sections of Brooklyn and

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Queens were smoking ruins. Youths of all sexes, colors and ages were engaged in senseless battle with police, National Guardsmen and each other. Our plane had to be diverted to the Central New Jersey jetport. And the bus that brought us to Manhattan through the smog needed its screaming motorcycle escort. Everywhere along the route were evidences of the start of a second Civil War that nobody really wanted.

"Except IMC," said Claudia. "Time's running out."

"Circe's on a real rampage." H. G. told us over the rim of a Gibson glass when we foregathered in the calm of the Twelve Gods. "As her uncle, I've tried to talk sense to her but she won't listen. She and her hogs are whipping up chaos everywhhere. I wonder why?"

"She's afraid of us." said Claudia. "And that's half the battle. H. G., I read in the *Odyssey* that the sprig of Moly you gave Odysseus undid Circe's spells. Can the stuff be used on a large scale?"

"Moly is only wild garlic . . . allium moly," said the broker. "I doubt that great quantities of it are available."

"It should be easy to obtain the basic ingredients by chemical synthesis," I said.

"But how do you get people to swallow it? And even if you get over that hurdle, how do you distribute the stuff in a hurry when anarchy is spreading across the world?"

"This way." Claudia exclaimed. "Put Moly in a soft drink and advertise the hell out of it. Most coffee tastes like medicine. So does tea. The colas must be flavored with glue. The first sip of a gin drink always makes one shudder." Yet people drink them all. I say that if the same people are told that a new drink is bad for them and has an exotic oriental flavor, they'll gulp garlic goo by the gallon."

"And don't worry about distribution." I put in. "If the polloi will pay for it, they'll get it. Remember what happened during World War II when shipping to North Africa got short? The U.S. Air Force used bombers to ferry tons of cola drinks into the area."

"Maybe you two should be joint IMC receivers." H. G. sipped as though he had never tasted gin before and didn't like it much. "Some of my rich Egyptian relatives happen to be long on soft drink investments. They could introduce the proposal to launch a new one at a special IMC Board meeting. And, no matter what other devilment Circe's up to, she's a sucker for get-rich-quick projects."

"Everyone present would have to sample the product." Claudia mused. "At best, we'd disenchant the directors. That would give us time to manage a world-wide disenchantment."

"And at worst." I said, "strangulation is fairly quick."

"Now that that's settled," my witch wife rushed on. "H. G. must arrange to hold our special meeting at night in that sunken outdoor restaurant at Rockefeller Plaza."

"Whyever for?" I puzzled.

"I don't want us to get caught in those IMC doors."

THE STARLIGHT GRILL is located in the same Radio City area that is used for ice skating in winter. It lies one story below the rest of the plaza and is dominated by a fountain where the heroic golden statue of Prometheus seems to fly, flaming brand in hand, encircled by the zodiac. Behind the Titan, jets of water soar to a uniform height of 20 feet or so before splashing into a marble basin.

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H. G. had gained Circe's approval of the unorthodox site by pointing out that, if the new product were endorsed, the meeting could become a press party that might generate much publicity: The fact that it was to be guarded by squads of New York's Finest who were badly needed elsewhere to quell riots may have played a part in Circe's decision.

This time Claudia and I were most carefully disguised. We wore impeccable evening clothes and carried forged documents identifying us as Mr. And Mrs. Leo Thoth of Cairo.

Claudia longed to bring Taxi. She compromised by hiding him in a cluttered room under the stairs where motorized snowscrapers are stored during the summer.

"Stay here unless I whistle," she commanded. "Understood?"

"Woof." He lay down in disgust and folded strong paws over long ears. (Taxi is better trained than most husbands.)

H. G. led us into the Grill on the warm, starry night of the meeting. This was a small affair. The 12 directors and a score or so of stockholding New Yorkers who had horned in were almost lost at tables arranged before the fountain.

The Secretary called the meeting to order at nine and turned it over to the dog-faced Vice President.

"Our President is superintending a riot in Flushing but she'll be along presently," the latter said with a leer. "She asks us to start on schedule because we're breaking corporation precedent by permitting news cameramen to film the proceedings. Therefore I will now introduce our old broker friend, H. G. Silverwater. He wishes to discuss an intriguing new product offered to use as a joint venture by Thoth Industries, Ltd., of Egypt."

Dapper in white tie and tails, our broker strode to the podium in front of the fountain and adjusted a microphone so his voice could be heard above the roar of waters and that made by a demonstration being staged before St. Patrick's Cathedral, half a block away. He introduced "Mr. and Mrs. Leo Thoth" and invited us to take seats beside him. Then he launched into a paean of praise to Lo-Ko, "a magical soft drink made according to a formula discovered in the Great Pyramid."

Hermes had a silver tongue. As he neared the climax of his speech spotlights annointed his silver hair, cameras at the street level clicked or whirred and a dozen fighter planes swept across the sky, spelling out endlessly in smoke:

DRINK LO-KO
DRINK LO-KO
DRINK LO-KO

"But, Gentlemen of the Board," H. G. studied the pseudo-porkers, hooked up as always to their translator, who sat blinking in the glare, "words cannot begin to describe the taste and effects of Lo-Ko. Its unique taste is due to small amounts of nectar and ambrosia. Its kick is provided by peyote, again in small quantities. It is habit-forming, but no more harmful to health than cigarettes. I need not tell you what that combination of virtues could mean in terms of higher IMC profits and dividends.

"Since words fail me I have asked our pretty maids to pass among you with samples. Only after you drink will I ask for a vote on whether our corporation shall promote Lo-Ko . . . Girls.' "

The maids from headquarters stepped from behind the fountain, trays in hand. Again the cameras came

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to life.

"To prove the product is harmless," he continued, "we will drink first. The Vice President and Secretary will try it next. Finally, the Directors will drink and then vote their approval or disapproval of the joint venture . . . Marie, please step this way."

A blond minx in black tripped forward, to the whir and click of cameras, with a tray bearing six glasses. H. G. put one aside for Circe, handed others to Claudia, me, the Vice President, the Secretary, and took the last himself.

"Louisa," he said. "Serve our honored Directors."

When a brunette in white had done so Hermes drained his glass and we followed suit. Nothing happened, of course, because he had been very careful with his behind-the-scenes bartending.

Self-conscious because of all the fuss, the two officers drank and the Directors lifted their goblets with anticipatory snuffles.

"Don't drink!" The command rang like a trumpet call from above us. "It's poisoned! Wait for Circe!"

"Baaa! Toooo laaate! !" bleated an old goat that reared up where the Secretary had been standing.

The Vice President fought the change that was coming over him but it was no use. His head . . . melted! It ran into three parts, each of which grew fangs. His clothing twisted, unable to accommodate to a body that was losing all human semblance. Yowling with pain and fright, the thing condensed into itself. It sank to all fours and snapped at the cloth that restrained it.

"Cerberus!" Claudia gasped.

The three-headed dog-demon heard its name. Disoriented, it faced her and snarled. Then it gathered its legs for a spring.

Claudia shoved two fingers into her mouth and whistled.

A brown arrow shot from the storeroom—a David to face Goliath. Cerberus shook his slavering heads and swerved to meet the attack.

Dachshunds are bred, however, to fight ferrets and groundhogs in their lairs. Instead of meeting the lunge shoulder-to-shoulder, Taxi rolled onto his back. As the monster stumbled over him, our small champion raked its belly with needle-sharp claws and fangs.

Cerberus howled, regained balance and charged once more.

This time Taxi had the gauge of his adversary. Again he rolled and put every ounce of himself into that under-the-belly chop.

Disemboweled, Cerebrus skidded along the floor, leaving a bloody trail. He had suffered a mortal wound . . . but was immortal. Whimpering, he dragged his own offal up the stairs toward the spot where Circe now stood tall and imperious, surrounded by a mob of reporters, photographers, cops and curious onlookers. Ignoring the horror that crawled toward her, the sorceress was speaking into a microphone that someone had shoved at her:

"I am President of the International Management Corporation," she said haughtily. "You know me, Captain Moriarty. I asked headquarters to assign you to guard the IMC Directors meeting downstairs. Now I must ask that you arrest the three persons standing by the fountain." She burst into tears of fury. "They're trying to take my corporation away from me."

"Just as you say, Ma'am," beamed the flattered captain.

Claudia turned her back on this tableau. Round arms uplifted, she was

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beautiful in her white sheath of evening gown as she cried, in her best hog-calling voice:

"Gaea! Prometheus! May Day! May Day! Come arunnin'!"

There was no clap of thunder; no flash of lightning. But, where the statue had hung, a pale giant in chains surveyed us with troubled eyes while an eagle pecked at his liver. Beside him stood a little old, agate-eyed lady in a green nightgown.

"Well, honey," said Gaea, "what can we do for you?"

"Show who's mistress here!"

"Sonny," said Gaea, "Take back your gift of fire."

"Yes, Mother." Lights in skyscrapers all about us began to fade.

"Not again!" an onlooker wailed.

The demonstrators in front of St. Pat's fell silent. Police sirens began hopping up and down the avenues like mad kangaroos. But Circe, at the head of New York's finest, marched steadily down the stairs.

The lights, including the spots trained on Circe, went out. Sirens stopped as squad car engines stalled. The whole city groaned.

Prom's eagle screamed. Released from its task at last, it soared toward freedom in expanding circles. The Earth Mother snapped bony fingers at the royal bird and pointed at Circe.

"Sic 'em!" she commanded.

All claws and red-stained beak, the eagle plummeted at the screaming sorceress. She only saved herself by diving under a table.

"Gentlemen," said Hermes after Gaea had called off the attacker. "Drink your potions."

They dithered a moment, looking askance at the disheveled demi-goddess still cowering in her hiding place, then obeyed with a will.

"Niece," Hermes dragged her forth, "Here's your resignation as IMC President. No, don't argue with me," as her lips drew back into a square mask of fury, "now that Cerberus can vote no longer, I hold proxies of a majority of the stockholders. And now that the elder gods are afoot, your spells have lost their power. Sign!"

"What becomes of me with no more mischief to make?" She spoke like a petulant child as she obeyed him.

"I couldn't care less. Why don't you go to . . . to visit your cousin Persephone?

"Gentlemen!" Hermes peered sternly through the gloom at the men . . . real men . . . who were dancing jigs among the tables. "Gentlemen, be seated!"

"You must continue in your posts as Directors," he went on when they had done so and the puzzled policemen had cleared the floor. "The corporation has actually been running earth for milennia. It must continue to do so until humans learn how to manage their own affairs once more. Otherwise we'd have complete chaos. It would be as if the international telephone network broke down completely. No one would know enough to start it up again.

"Our first order of business is to elect new officers. Do I hear nominations for Treasurer, Secretary, Vice President and President.

"H. G. . . . I mean Hermes for Treasurer and me for Secretary," Claudia smiled impishly.

"Gaea for President. Prometheus for Vice President," I proposed . . . illegally, of course, since I held no IMC stock.

"Any further nominations? I hear none. All in favor say 'Aye', contrary 'No'; the 'Ayes' have it," Hermes

(cont. on page 89)

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Like a haiku, in 400 words, Peter Andrews gives us—

The Collected Poems of Xirius Five

PETER J. ANDREWS

GENTLEMEN,

With regard to the curious behavior exhibited by the inhabitants of Tank Thirty-six, I would like to apologize. In truth, it never entered my mind that they would decide to expunge the Orgo, especially since they themselves are so intricately determined by the Down Mouser.

There is no excuse. The Orgo will be functioning normally again by the time the tank reaches perihelion, and Down Mouser is at this very moment being Integrate-sampled so that we can determine any deviant biopatterns.

Signed,
Step-General Robert Busby Lewis
for the Cresan Command

DOWN MOUSER to tankers. Failure is a temporary state; surrender is forever. Never doubt. Always question. Drive to the heart of what is ice and steel and mineral.

MEDICAL INTELLIGENCE STATEMENT
No. 9800146
Subject: The Down Mouser.

Integrate-sampling indicates a basic distortion in reality template. Restructurings similar to prescientific conscience have been observed. Analysis indicates maladjustment is complete.

Speculation. The subject has been infected with nonrational data.

Recommendation. Continued study and exhaustive investigation of all deviant aspects of the subject. Also, studies lead us to concur with the suggestion that a Conventional be installed at Tank Thirty-six.

DOWN MOUSER to tankers. Living is to be taken seriously, but life is not. Hardships are just another kind of chemical for synthesis. When they do not understand, who is stronger?

CONFIDENTIAL. Spyeye 7 to the Cresan Command.

Tankers are still running deviant systems are still mind-linking to the Down Mouser. The Orgo is far from restored. Failure overwhelms the Conventional. Subliminal control over tankers no longer appears to be possible.

Recommendation. Eliminate Tank Thirty-six.

DOWN MOUSER to tankers. Lament. Brothers of Thirty-six have passed beyond our reach. Rejoice. Brothers of Thirty-six are become the living crystal, the completely free and structured. Theirs is the secret.

Eternity bows graciously with a smile on her lips.

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URGENT

Labourluv to Cresan Command. Att. S/G Lewis

Orgos have failed in tanks seven, sixteen, and twenty-five. Subefficiencies are projected for tanks nine, eighteen, and twenty-seven. Several Q-systems are beginning to deteriorate. Is an analysis team available?

GENTLEMEN,

Xirius Five has gone almost totally nonrational. Down Mouser has been eliminated, but the trend is extant.

It is recommended that a policy of sterilization of nonrational infecteds be initiated. Also, an absolute quarantine should be imposed on Xirius Five immediately

Signed,
Step-General Robert Busby Lewis
for the Cresan Command

—PETER J. ANDREWS

Leasehold (cont. from page 86)

steamrollered. "Now I'm open to suggestions as to where and how we start our cleanup."

"I'll recommend to the Pentagon that we pull our troops out of Brazil," spoke up a be-medalled general.

"I shall advise Egypt to rescind its holy war."

"I'll order the Fed to stop stalling and put the screws on inflation."

"Good," said Hermes, his white hair shining in the pale moonlight, when all of the Directors had promised to initiate reforms. "Fine. Wonderful, in fact. Do I hear any other suggestions . . . Mrs. Secretary?"

"If I'm to take any minutes of this meeting," Claudia said crisply, "Vice President Prometheus will have to give back his gift."

"Sonny!" chirped Gaea.

And there was light.

—WALLACE WEST

ON SALE NOW IN AMAZING—AUG.
THE BIG ALL STAR ISSUE

THE WINNING OF GLORIA GRANDONWHEELS
ROBERT F. YOUNG
COLD THE STARS ARE, COLD THE EARTH
RICHARD C. MEREDITH
MURDER IN TRIPLICATE
CHARLES SHEFFIELD
CATALYST
CHARLES V. DE VET
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JIM ROSZELL

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THE HAIRY PARENTS

A. BERTRAM CHANDLER

He was an odd man: his dreams were of long ago and far away. But what if they became reality. . . ?

Illustrated by JOHN RODAK

We met him at one of those small seaside resorts, with a name all "M"s and "L"s and "O"s, on the Queenland Coast, north of Brisbane. It was midwinter, but the weather, to those of us from the more southerly States, was pleasantly warm, even hot at times, during the day. There were quite a few holiday makers who, like ourselves, had come north to enjoy the sunshine. He was one of them.

He had the holiday flat underneath ours. We couldn't avoid running in to him now and again when we were on our way to or from the beach. There was no possibility of our not recognising him; he was a remarkably ugly man. It was not a repellent ugliness, his face exhibited the rather pathetic cheerfulness of the higher apes. When he was wearing only swimming trunks and sandals his resemblance to an ape to a gorilla, was even more pronounced. His body was thick, his legs bowed. A mat of coarse hair covered his chest and belly, a corresponding mat coated his back. There was very little exposed skin on his arms and legs, apart from the bald patches on his knees and elbows. With the aid of only a little trick photography, but no assistance from the make-up department, he could have played King Kong if Hollywood ever got around to refilming that classic yet again.

One morning we left the flat as usual, shortly after breakfast, wearing our costumes and carrying towels. We crossed the road to the promenade, then made our way down to the beach and found a spot against the sea wall where we were shielded from the slight but chilly breeze and got the full benefit of the sun. Sandra opened her book—it was Morris's *The Naked Ape*—and I got going on the cryptic crossword in the morning paper. I admit that I wasn't paying too much attention to the crossword; not far from us two girls, in their late teens to judge from their physical development, but probably younger, were sitting. Their bikinis left very little to the imagination, and I have always liked the combination of very blonde hair with a deep tan . . .

Too young . . . I decided, after having listened to their conversation. Their voices were high and childish, and they were asking each other riddles. "What's the difference," demanded one, "between the Prince of Wales, a bald man, and a monkey's mother?"

"Tell me," pleaded the other at last.

"Don't you *know*?" in an incredu-

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lous squeal.

"You *know* I don't. Shirl. Come *on*!"

"Well. the Prince of Wales is the Heir Apparent. A bald man is no hair apparent. And a monkey's mother is a hairy parent!"

Ha, ha, I thought sardonically, but if I'd said it out loud I should not have been heard above the cacaphony of girlish laughter. Surely the joke was not all that funny . . . And then Shirl gasped, "A hairy parent . . . Would you *believe* it?"

I looked round. Our neighbour from the downstairs flat, attired in skimpy swimming trunks, was shambling along the beach. The knuckles of his dangling hands were, in fact, well clear of the sand but seemed to be actually brushing it. He stopped when he came abreast of us and smiled; it was a charming smile. He asked, "Do you mind if I sit here? This seems to be the only place out of the wind . . . "

"Go ahead," I told him.

He flopped down on to the sand beside me. The two girls, on his other hand, got up and walked off haughtily. I admired the jiggling of their young buttocks. Sandra looked up from her book and said, "Good morning, Mr. Cormack."

"And a good morning to you, Mrs. Whitley. And it *is* a good morning. All this sun . . . "

She said. "I *love* the sun . . . "

"And I do, too . . ." He glanced at the cover of Sandra's book. "Those naked apes on the jacket certainly know what's good for them . . ." (The "naked apes" were a man, woman and child, all unclothed, all with overall tans.) He went on, "Have you read *African Genesis*?"

"Not yet," she told him.

"Oh, you should. I still can't see,

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though, why our ancestors should have left Africa, with its civilised climate, for Northern Europe . . . "

"And-if they'd stayed put?" I asked. "These *ifs* of history . . . *If* Homo Sapiens didn't have that built-in urge to explore there wouldn't be a fantastically expensive buggy parked on the Moon. Come to that, *we* shouldn't be here now . . . "

"Not only Homo Sapiens," he said. "There was also Neanderthal Man."

"But he was doomed, in any case. He was outclassed by the *true* men."

"What do you mean by the *true* men?" To my surprise Cormack sounded quite indignant. "Neanderthal Man *was* a true man, at least as much a man as the Cromagnards. Oh, he wasn't pretty by *their* standards, perhaps, but he was a damn' sight smarter. Too smart for his own good, as it turned out."

I laughed. "Come off it, Mr. Cormack. He looked like an ape, and he had the brains of an ape . . . " I regretted having said that, bearing in mind Cormack's own appearance.

Rather to my relieved surprise he did not take offense. He said, "Appearances aren't everything, you know . . . "

"Then just how was Neanderthal Man too smart for his own good?" (Sandra had abandoned all attempts at reading and was listening, a faint smile curving her full mouth.) "If he'd been all that smart he'd have stayed in Africa," I persisted.

"The original migration," Cormack told me, "probably seemed a good idea at the time. Richer hunting grounds, without the carnivores, such as lions, that hunted men as well as the other animals, away to the north. A climate in Europe that was still quite good—until the Ice Age set in . . . "

"Then why didn't the Neanderthaler go back to where he came from?"

"We don't know how the Ice Age started. Probably it was a gradual process, with every summer a little less warm than the previous one, with every winter just a little bit colder. And when even the summers got cold Neanderthal Man must have shrugged his shoulders and muttered, 'She'll be right again *next* year . . . ' But she wasn't right again, not for millenia. It was a long drawn out deterioration, though, stretched over decades, over generations. By the time that conditions got really grim the Neanderthalers had put down roots in their new tribal grounds. They'd forgotten the way back to Africa—and, in any case, the way was barred by hostile tribes. They put their brains to work and found ways to make their lives tolerable, even comfortable. After all, they were superb technicians, without equal . . . "

"Superb technicians?" I demanded incredulously.

"Too right. The weapons and tools they used, made from bone and stone, were superior to those being made at the same time by the much ballyhooed Cromagnards. They were hunters. They dressed the skins of the beasts they killed and sewed them into fur garments . . . "

"Then why didn't they survive?"

"As I said, they were too smart for their own good."

"Even when—according to you—they were as snug as bugs in a rug?"

"Especially then."

"How do you make that out?" I demanded.

"It's obvious—or should be. They were too proud of their beautiful fur coats. They never took them off—except in bed."

"And why should they have done?"

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He laughed softly. "Why have *we* removed all our clothing but for the bare minimum?"

"To get a tan, of course."

"Of course. A tan—and Vitamin D. So that if it happens to be in short supply in our diets it's still being manufactured by our bodies. The Neanderthalers didn't know about Vitamin D. If they had known, it would all have turned out differently. They'd have made a point of baring their bodies to the sun as much as possible. After all, you can sunbathe in comfort in the lee of an iceberg, or a glacier. If they'd got some sun on their skins they and their children would not have been crippled and killed by rickets."

"I suppose so," I admitted. Rickets *is* a vitamin deficiency disease. And I remembered reading about the craze for nude winter sports that there'd been in Europe a while ago. The young men and women in those photographs, naked except for ski boots and skis, had looked healthy enough.

"You seem to know a lot about Neanderthal Man, Mr. Cormack," put in Sandra sweetly.

He grinned at her. "I do, I suppose, compared to most people. He's one of the bees—the only bee—in my bonnet. You know how it is. People tend to make various periods of history their very own. There's usually a reason . . . "

"And yours is. . . ?" she persisted.

Why ask? I thought. *Every time that he looks into a mirror he identifies with his bloody Neanderthalers . . .*

He ignored me then, talked only to Sandra. He said. "There was interbreeding, of course, between the two races, the Neaderthalers and the Cromagnards. Their tribes must have been in contact from time to time. There was fighting, perhaps, and women captured. There were hybrids, crossbreeds. Even when Neanderthal Man was dead, his genes lived on . . . Recessive genes, probably. But, every now and again, somebody—somebody like me—gets born who's a throw-back to the original stock."

"You don't really think. . . ?" I began, getting back into the conversation.

"I don't think. I *know*, Whitley. And I'm proud of my ancestry. *My* forefathers weren't scavengers, picking over the half-putrid leavings of the big carnivores. They were hunters, from the very start. Save for that slip-up over ultra-violet they had the climate licked. *They* survived where the Cromagnards would have just curled up and died."

"But they didn't survive . . . " said Sandra gently.

"I . . . I was forgetting . . ." Abruptly he was deflated, looked for a moment or so like an empty gorilla suit that somebody had left on the beach. I almost felt sorry for him. Almost—but I've never been one of those to get all hot and bothered about his ancestors. One of mine was hanged from his own yardarm for piracy, but he deserved it. If his seamanship or his gunnery—or his luck—had been better he might have finished up the same way that Sir Henry Morgan did, but my heart doesn't bleed for him.

"Time we had our swim," said Sandra brightly, getting to her feet.

"It is," I agreed. "Coming in, Cormack?"

"No thanks," he said. "The sun'll do me."

When we returned from the sea he was gone.

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THAT NIGHT, as we were sitting reading after dinner, Sandra threw a magazine towards me. She said, "There's an article here that Mr. Cormack would like to read . . ."

"Why?" I asked, looking up from my own book.

"It's about Neanderthal Man. It makes almost the same points that he made this morning."

"Probably he got them from this same article."

"I . . . I don't think so. He was so . . . sincere. He was *feeling* it all . . ."

"Don't tell me that you've fallen for him."

She laughed. "Don't be absurd. But I do feel sort of sorry for him, and impressed. Why don't we take this down to him? I like to hear him talk . . ."

"At this time of night?"

"It's not late."

"Oh, all right."

We got up and went out to the upstairs verandah, and then down the outside staircase. The lights were on in Cormack's flat, and from a half open window drifted the noise of his radio, pop music interspersed with commercials. I knocked at his door. There was no reply. I knocked again, louder.

"Perhaps he's out," Sandra said doubtfully. "But . . ."

"I'll take a dekko through the window," I said.

He wasn't out—not in the sense of physical absence. He was slumped in a chair. I thought at first that he was drunk. He was oblivious to the world—*this* world. He was staring straight at me, but he wasn't seeing me. His hairy hand came slowly up to his mouth, and between the thick fingers was a hand-rolled cigarette. He inhaled deeply. It was then that I noticed the sweet-acrid smell of the smoke. It was not from tobacco.

"Pot . . . ?" whispered Sandra, who had joined me.

"Looks like it. Smells like it . . ."

"Well, it's *his* business how he gets his kicks."

We went back up. After a while we turned in.

The next morning, as we were leaving for the beach, I asked Sandra, "Where did you put that magazine? I might as well read that article you were so taken with."

She looked embarrassed. "I . . . I must have left it on Mr. Cormack's windowsill . . . What will he *think*?"

"He should be worrying about what *we* think," I said.

RATHER TO our surprise he joined us in the sunny lee of the sea wall. He was carrying the magazine. He said, "Thank you for this. It's good to see that the scientists are coming round at last."

"I thought that it would interest you," said Sandra.

"It did." He sat down. He seemed to be making up his mind on what to say next. Then, quite abruptly, "So you know that I smoke . . ."

"You should have had your windows shut and the curtains drawn," I told him severely. "We're broad-minded, but not everybody is, the police especially."

He managed a grin. "I suppose you're right. I must be more careful in future . . ."

"Why do you *do* it, Mr. Cormack?" asked Sandra earnestly, who was in one of her missionary moods.

"There are . . . reasons. Good ones."

"There are no reasons," she told him severely. "Only excuses. All these things—alcohol, marijuana—are only crutches. Throw away your crutches."

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He looked at her sadly. "I told you. There's a reason. A *very* good reason . . ." He was silent for a few seconds, then went on, "I'll tell you. To begin with, some drugs, such as pot, are consciousness-expanding . . ."

"The people who take them *think* that their consciousness is being expanded," said Sandra.

"Cogito, ergo sum," I put in, but nobody paid any attention to me.

"I *know* that mine is being expanded," Cormack insisted. "When I smoke, it takes my mind back to the Ice Age in Europe . . . My *mind*? It takes *me* back. I see what my ancestors saw. I feel what they felt. I *know* what it's like to stand up to a bear armed with only a stone axe, and come out on top. I've watched the women scraping the hide with their stone knives, cutting it to pattern, sewing it with their bone needles with sinew for thread . . ."

"Is that where you were—or *when* you were—last night?" I asked.

"Yes." There was no defiance in the affirmative, just a statement of fact.

"H'm. . . ? Race memory. . . ? You still haven't convinced me. Why should *you*, when you get high, travel through time, when the average pot smoker just gets high, period, and just has a good time?"

"There are so few of *us*," he said seriously. "You, the descendants of Cromagnon Man, are in the majority. There are billions of you. When you go on a drug trip it's like switching on a radio when there's an infinitude of stations broadcasting on the same frequency . . . But even then something gets through sometimes. All the alleged—but some of it quite convincing—evidence for reincarnation . . . And that woman who wrote those remarkably detailed books about ancient Egypt . . ."

What a nut! I thought. *But a harmless one, and an interesting one.* I said. "So you're tapping race memories . . ."

"More than that. I *am* a member of that tribe living under the glacier. . . That cliff of green ice, gleaming in the sun . . . The trickles of cold water during the days when the sky is clear and there's no wind . . . But it freezes at night, and the glacier has always edged forward another fraction of an inch . . .

"You know, it's not a bad life . . . I'm a man of importance, of course, which helps . . . *I'm* a man of importance? No, that's wrong. It's Murg the Hunter who's important; I'm no more than an observer in his mind. But I'm trying to break through. *I* know, you see, what's going to happen to his people, and I could stop it . . . It's just a matter of making suggestions, of starting a religion . . ."

"Starting a *religion*?" asked Sandra.

"Why not? Somebody has to start religions. Sun worship—that'd be the answer. A ritual baring of the body to the radiance of the god. Now and again Murg will be resting in some place out of that bitter wind, and he'll be *sweating* inside his furs, but will he take them off? Not he."

"No worse," I said, "than the old-fashioned types we used to see once, wearing their blue serge suits, complete with waistcoats, in the middle of the Australian summer . . ."

"But even the oldres now are dressing more sensibly," said Sandra.

"The climate of the times," I said.

"It's the climate of *those* times that I'm up against," Cormack told us. "If only I could break through into Murg's mind . . . He has quite a good one, you know. He's a leader, an innovater. He has charisma . . ." (I tried hard to visualise a charismatic

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Neanderthaler but without much success.) "Even without the religious angle the people would tend to copy what he did . . . "

"Break through. . . ?" murmured Sandra.

"And why not, Mrs. Whitley? How do you explain the visions which your people have seen now and again, visions which have inspired them to change the course of history? Could those visions, perhaps, have been induced in their minds by some time traveller, some time traveller in the psychological rather than the physical sense, from the future? Why not?"

"Mphm . . . " I grunted.

WE DIDN'T SEE MUCH of Cormack after that. He left, to return to Melbourne, the next day. We stayed on for another fortnight.

We almost forgot Cormack. Almost—and then those dreams started. Alternate Universe dreams are, I suppose, an occupational hazard of a science fiction writer's sleep. I've had them before, about worlds in which nothing was changed except my own circumstances, based on memories of some crossroads at which I could have taken the left hand instead of the right hand path. But these dreams are frighteningly different. *I* haven't changed, but the world has. I'm an outsider, one of the few throw-backs to a long dead race. It wouldn't be so bad if I had those nightmares only at nights, during my sleep.

But the other day . . .

We were out at Bondi, on a fine Summer Sunday morning. The sun was hot, the sea was blue, the beach crowded. We found a few square feet of vacant sand under the sea wall and stretched out. There were rather too many people for our tastes, otherwise we had nothing to complain about.

And then . . .

It was as though a cloud had come over the sun, although the sky was cloudless. There was a sudden chill, and a feeling of almost unbearable tension—and of something snapping. Heat came back into the air and colour into the light. Nothing was changed. I opened my eyes properly. *Everything was changed.*

The beach was crowded, still, with men, women and children—all completely naked. (That part was all right, I'm among the advocates of free beaches.) But what men, what women and what children! The graceless bodies with their thick coats of coarse hair, the bowed legs, the bulging bellies, the pendulous dugs—and the happy, simian faces.

This can't be true! I thought desperately.

And then, quite suddenly, it wasn't. Things snapped back to normal. I looked around. Sandra, supine, with tightly shut eyes, had obviously experienced nothing. And people were talking and laughing and yelling as usual, and the ubiquitous transistors were blaring. But there were a few, only a few, sunbathers looking around them with frightened faces.

I remembered Cormack and his wild theories. Suppose he really was, by some freak of genetics, a full-blooded Neanderthal Man . . . Suppose he was succeeding in making sun worshippers out of the tribe of Urg the Hunter . . .

And suppose that somewhen in the remote Past the world was being switched on to a different Time Track . . .

Was Neanderthal Man, rather than his Cromagnon cousin, the Heir Apparent?

—A. BERTRAM CHANDLER

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John Shirley's last appearance here was "Silent Crickets" (April, 1975); he returns with unique look at–

TAHITI IN TERMS OF SQUARES

JOHN SHIRLEY

Illustrated by Tony Gleeson

Now: I'm going to tell you something—

Go right ahead. Parent paid for it, not me, so talk away.

—and you'd better be paying strict attention. First I'll tell it to you, then you'll begin to see it, manifesting before you. Because that's the way things work here.

Okay. I'm listening.

Listening isn't good enough. If you want to *see* you must give me your complete attention. Concentration.

All right! I'm paying attention.

Good. This concerns Tahiti. I offer a cinematic exegesis in arbitrarily selected stages of that continuum.

Which continuum?

That one . . . . over *there*.

Oh, okay. I'm with you—

Before I begin, read off the pertinent points on the introductory pamphlet. I want to be utterly assured you know exactly what we're up to, coming here. Why the Between is useful to us.

The Between? I don't need to read the pamphlet. Anyhow, I threw it away. Ummm . . . . what we're doing here is—

Threw it away? Threw away the *pamphlet*? After the agency spends involuted Karmas to have those pamphlets grammed! I hardly think that's a—

Doesn't matter, I memorized it. More or less. It said this field trip will enable me to attain objectivity in the antiduality perspective achieved through the externalization of parity . . . . which is one of those attitudes Parent thinks it's so necessary to adopt. Privately I don't understand why Parent is so anti-Subjectivist. Anyhow, it said I've been brought to this vast, clammy, pearly-white place with the two definitionless curving walls so . . . . Could I have a drink off your bulb? I didn't bring one.

Go on, go on; why were you brought here?

Oh. So I'll learn something by graphic example. A lesson concerning the mechanics utilized in the insemination of zones of reality. So the pamphlet claimed. Something like that. Personally, I think Parent assumes the whole thing will engender in me a reactionary Objectivist philosophy— or some such nonsense . . . I'm *dry* after all that ranting, can I have a drink off your bulb? Ah, thanks—

'Some such nonsense'! Puerile

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half-weaned! It is far from nonsense. This exercise will help to assure you never get lost while plane-sifting. In the Between we can objectively observe the means with which zones of reality radiate from archetypal cusps, after which everything else in that sphere of wavelength-specific influence is patterned. Got it?

Yeah, sure. Got it.

Hey—don't drink it all. You could have exchanged for your own bulb . . . Now, Let me . . . here it is . . . this is 'prime *A* for Tahiti Continuum'. Look—right over *there*. Come a few steps this way. Now look where I'm pointing. See him? *There*:

He glanced at the watch strapped on his left wrist. The face of the watch said noiselessly: "It's time." The watch had no hands or dial, nothing but two pale rubbery lips set into the face and he read the lips as would a deaf person, though he wasn't deaf. He might as well have been deaf because he was alone in the abode of silence and as far as he knew there was no one outside of silence's abode at all, and even if there were, surely no one would be capable of breaking in through silence's unspeakable defenses. And he didn't comprehend speaking except in terms of squares . . . you'd have thought the room that contained him was about fifty feet square with three yards between floor and ceiling. No furniture. He didn't need furniture, and although he possessed a human body he didn't sleep or rest or ingest or digest or excrete (except in the nonmaterial terms of the squares). The palpitating tissues, the anticipatory wetness of his human flesh was ready and waiting to sweat/eat/spit/digest/excrete/excite but none of those reactions were indigenous to the time frame in which the body was ever-

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presently coded. It had been deliberately coded into the flicker between two heartbeats, between two breaths. But he moved about and he had the false impression it was under his own power . . . that's all you need to know about *him*, as he stands as an individual, except if you want to know what he looked like.

Yes, I rather would.

Oh. You would? Troublesome of you. But all right. He had an average man's body, for the middle twentieth century era, Tahiti continuum; he was English, caucasian, six foot and one hundred sixty pounds, sparse and extra-soft brown hair, watery blue eyes. But he would have looked strange to the biological refractions patterned after him because his face and head were that of an infant of three weeks, homo sapiens baby, soft and inchoate, vague like a baby though the volume of the head was proportionate to his body.

No eyebrows?

None. When his watch told him it was time which it periodically did—

I can see him! Over against that curving wall, by all those checker-things, in—

Obviously, idiot. Why else would I be explicating him? Verbal description is the token for this vending machine. As you can see, he is and was . . . I'll restrict my narrative to past tense because past tense *here* sparks the present tense *there*, which is the apropos mechanics of that locale—

Or maybe you're just nostalgic and sentimental.

Shut up and listen. Now: He was alerted by the watch to the necessity of palming the squares. You can see the squares on the walls, there.

Squares in a variety of colors, yeah. Pastel shades.

Yes. Each square a foot in diameter and six inches from the others, evenly patterning the walls. None on ceiling and floor—

I can see that for myself—

Shut up, it's necessary for me to say it. Where were we? Oh: He went to the walls and pressed his palm against the light brown square. When the palm of his soft, uncalloused hand, his right hand, pressed onto the surface, it is adhered gently, with a sticky commingling—

Hey! You're narrating that in the present tense! You said *'is* adhered gently . . .'

Ah, thank you. Very kind of you to bring that to my attention. Very kind. Naturally I'd have noticed it myself in time.

Naturally. But . . . why can't you narrate in present tense?

It's dangerous.

Dangerous! Oh *really*—

Laugh if you like. It is dangerous.

What happens if you narrate this scenario in present tense?

I suppose I can demonstrate if I do it in a very cautiously controlled manner. *Observe*:

He smiles, enjoying the onrush of physicalized data, abandoning himself to it like a death-dwarf-junkie to a rush, he sighs and presses his arm further in, to the wrist, to the forearm, elbow, until the arm is immersed in the stuff, vanished into the wall, and his shoulder begins to sink also, his head grows rubbery and pliant as it is sucked into the square—

Hey! You'd better cut that out. He's disappearing, his head is *going*.

The longer I do it the more difficult it is to reverse. Now, as you can see, the image is frozen, he is half in the square, its precipitous consumption of him halted because I've stopped narrating altogether. But if I were to continue, the inertia of the present

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tense narration, which tends to proliferate its own future because its inception in *now*, causes a hollow in the *to be* which must be filled since time follows the path of least resistance, like everything else.

Well—can you get him out of there?

I can now; the inertia didn't build up to the degree I lost control. *Listen*: Realizing he'd gone too far, he drew his arm out of the dun square, slowly, letting the data-dew drain cleanly away and back to its source, as his head and limb returned to their normal aspects . . . He stood back, stretched, sighed, and began again, this time more conservative in his rate of induction. When the palm of his soft, uncalloused right hand pressed onto the surface, it was adhered gently with sticky commingling. Now he experiences the tea gustatorially, smells its boiled aroma, is aware of its initial texture on his lips.

Hey, aren't you narrating in—

Don't interrupt again, you're distracting me. I have to concentrate. Keep your eyes on him; how else do you expect to learn? *Heed*:

The drink is silvery, it is earthcolored, it is velvet, it is mischievously steamy. He does not linger amongst these superficial sensations. He goes on. His hand slowly sinks into the brown square, the edges of tea-data brinking his flesh seeping up, around his knuckles and over the back of his hand, creeping over his wrist. If he chooses, he can press his entire arm up to the shoulder into the brown square which would then expand to accommodate the remainder of his body, the other squares shrinking to compensate. But he sinks only up to his shoulder . . . Comprende?

Solid. Yeah.

So this provides him with an orderly immersion into the whole matrix between the origins, the empirical and the conclusions of various strains of *Thea Sinensis*. Tea. He is aware of the tea in every cell and pore now, and his back is rigid, his eyes rolled upward, as he relishes the trance. He is aware (in rippling fibrillations coursing his fingers and arm, traveling down into his spine by unbroken but oscillating channel) of the etiology of the earliest forms of the plant identifiable as a strain of *Thea Sinensis*, its taste relative to the latest flavor in the manifold tea hybrids, its genetic makeup, how it came to cross-pollinate into yet another form of tea, and another, how that tea was discovered and savored in turn by a clan of naked savages, how those savages were affected by the tea, the trading of that tea to other tribes and the articles for which it was traded, the effect of the tea on the other tribe, the cultural reverberations of the tea, the various comparative hybrid phases and related species developed deliberately or accidentally by these tribes and by the civilizations engineered by their progeny and the status of tea therein, all books written about tea including recipes and treatises on the various complementary additives, the names and life histories of all tea manufacturers, plantation owners, connoisseurs; the cultural effect of tea on every society into which it is introduced, the colors, scents and textures of the leaf and flower and their configurations in botanists' schematics, the microscopically discerned panoply of a cross-section of tea-plant cells, the plants viewed through the filter of the fourth and the fifth dimensions, the rituals and traditions stemming from the various historic derivations of tea, the names and life stories of the first person who ever

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used tea and the last who ever will—

All this and more?

Exactly. But the information, somatically calibrated data, does not linger in the brain cells of our babyface; it lights the lamps and then snuffs the flame an instant after it is lit. When at last babyface extracts his arm from the square he recollects none of what he's just experienced and measured. His arm is clean when it is removed. The brown substance (physical realization of data) does not cling to his skin, and its information eschews internment in memory. And the surface of the square closes up as if it had never been disturbed . . .

Hey, you've changed from past—

Don't interrupt! Watch him! Now having finished tea it is time for a walk down the beach. He goes to—

Hey, listen, should you have changed from—

Shut up! He goes to the next square in line, to the left, which is pastel shades of sunset red and tropical sky blue and beach-sand white and bamboo yellow and palmtrunk brown, all gently blended strata. He places his palm against this polychromatic square and sinks only up to the wrist. He is no longer aware of his arm as entering the square, now he is all rapport with the sensory-eidetic organ-music of data; surrounding and permeating this beach in Tahiti about '1910 A.D.', relative to this confluence. He raptures in the atomic structure of sands and the wavelength dissection of photons in refraction with sea spray and contrasted with the various poems written about the tropics (read in alphabetical order) and theses concerning Tahiti written up till January 1, 1910.

Ah, as with tea but more so?

Just so.

I see. But still you've changed your—

Quiet! Now he glances at the watch on his left wrist—he does this with that part of his reflexes specially reserved for that action—and registers: "Time for lunch." So he begins to withdraw his arm, shedding cognizance as he does, preparing to depart the beach square so that he can progress to the lunch square that is the absolute fact of a sandwich, a ham and cheese sandwich on stale imported rye and all the background and layers of sensation infinitely minute and macrocosmically unfolding from that node of perception. He draws his arm out—

Hey! I'm trying to *tell* you, you've gotten into present tense!

What? I . . . Oh *damn*, I've gone and done it now. That'll result in a stress pattern and rupture the membrane unless I can keep up, overtake the verbal realizations, catch up, slow it down to past tense. Get control again. Like trying to harness maddened horses, at this point. Why The Monitor didn't you tell me this before I—

I'm sorry. I tried.

Nevermind. I've got to concentrate or it's going to fly out of its groove and strike off on its own. Ah, his arm is emerging—was emerging?—from the square and suffers a spasm, his fingers get caught on the edge of the square, the inner edge on the interior of the pastel shades. He tugs, a little furrow of frustration invading his otherwise dispassionate face, and the wall quivers under the pull. He cannot disengage his fingers from the inner edge of the wall-frame and, angrily, he gives it a furious yank. This time there is a crackling sound—

I feel all cold inside. I don't like this feeling in my guts. A chill. Unpleasant, brittle. Something getting

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loose inside me. I—

Quiet! I'm losing ground, dammnit! Ah, a crackling sound and a portion of the seemingly unbreakable wall comes loose in his fingers, chipped off, (Oh damn it all!) and the liquid inferential being in the square comes pouring out of the gap and splatters babyface about the feet. He staggers, he turns to run but is overwhelmed and vanishes from view as the section of the square that was green-yellow licks out and expands like a fire in a match factory and the room begins to fill up with bamboo shoots shooting and leaves unfolding. Quickly after comes the brown and the blue and the white formulating into magically upspringing palmtrees and billows of sky-gas and the room is suddenly filled to capacity with shifting arabesques of sand and water and foliage, exceeding the bursting point as babyface is compressed and annihilated, processed into seminal droplets which fertilize the soil of the frenetically proliferating island paradise growing like a self-inflating rubber raft and Oh Damn I can't catch up, I've lost the reins—

What's happening? I can't see! It's all a boiling of liquified leaves and sandstorm and there went a swordfish! The wall is crackling, the walls of white . . . Hey! It's coming out *here*.

It's making a break for it, spilling into the Between, it's going to have to compensate itself now, engender a plane in which to root the tropical belt—oh damn—hold your breath, I'll attempt an—

"HAROLD! Look at those two on the beach up there. In the shade of those palms."

He shrugged. "Just a couple of beach-combers, dear, I doubt they'll be any trouble. They look a trifle dazed, don't they?"

"*Dazed* is hardly the word. Harold they're *naked*!"

"Ah . . . yes indeed. So they are . . Well bother! Come about, dear, we'll do well to turn back. We'll complain to the desk clerk at the Captain Bligh. He said the riffraff had been cleared off the beach. Hedonists of some sort, by the look of them. And white, too! Oh *do* stop crying, Emily."

"I can't help it. They look *mad*. We've got to hurry. And I shall expect you to complain to the consulate."

"Of course. But I'm sure they . . . quite harmless. The light was sort of . . . ah . . . diffused about them. And I could swear that neither one had a nose . . ."

Shading her eyes against the sun's tropical glare she gazed timorously over her shoulder.

She shrieked.

"They're coming *after* us."

(Running footsteps, heavy breathing, curses from the British gentleman as he stumbles. His wife valiantly pauses to help him rise.)

Excuse me, said one of the odd, pallid men as he caught up with them, *I wonder can you direct us back to the Between? We've no idea how to get back from here. Frankly, we're quite lost. Terribly sorry about all this. The world. Spilled something. Sorry. Dreadful inconvenience. I know.*

He said it in a language that anyone anywhere in the universe would instantly have understood.

—JOHN SHIRLEY

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A MALADY OF MAGICKS

The Wizard Ebenezum had a nose for trouble . . . and that was exactly the trouble!

CRAIG SHAW GARDNER

Illustrated by JOE STATON

(1)

"A good magician always watches his feet. It also does no harm to be constantly aware of the nearest exit."

—from *The Teachings of Ebenezum* Vol. 3.

MAY I STATE NOW, once and for all, that I did not see the bucket.

My master, the wizard Ebenezum, was expounding at great length to a potential client concerning his abilities to sniff out sorcery wherever it might occur. He was also carefully avoiding any mention of the affliction that allowed him to do this so well.

I was crossing the room with a full load of firewood. The last of it, I might add, which we could ill afford to burn, save that, in those days and that place, the best way to attract a client was to pretend that you didn't need one. Thus the roaring fire on a day only moderately cool. And Ebenezum, who filled the room with grand gestures while speaking smoothly from beneath his great grey beard. Like any magician worth his runes, he could easily talk a customer into enchantment before any magicks were expended. Such an expert was he in fact, that I got caught up in the conversation and did not watch my feet.

Curse that bucket anyways! Down I went, spilling firewood across the table between the wizard and his client, neatly breaking his spell.

Ebenezum turned on me with eyes full of cosmic anger, another trick he was all too good at.

"See!" the client shrieked in a high voice. "I am cursed! It follows me wherever I go!" He hugged short arms around his pudgy body.

The wizard turned back to him, anger replaced by a smile so warm it would melt the ice on Midwinter Eve. "You don't know my apprentice," he said softly. "Cursed, no. Clumsy, yes."

Pudgy's hands came back to the table. "B-but . . . "

"The only curse here is when I signed a seven-year contract for his services." The magician smiled broadly. "I assure you, no magic is involved."

"If you say so." The client managed to smile. I picked myself off the bench and smiled back. Just joy and happiness all around.

"I feel I can trust you," the client continued. "Will you look at my barn?"

"Certainly." The magician managed to cough gently without losing his smile.

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The client, who had obviously dealt with artists long enough to know what such coughs meant, reached within the blue silk sash that circled his ample waist and pulled out a small purse. It thunked most satisfyingly when he dropped it on the table.

The client shrugged. "My crops have been good . . ." He frowned. "'Till late."

"They shall be good again. When shall we—"

"As soon as possible. Perhaps tomorrow, at dawn?"

The wizard's face did not betray the slightest agony at the mention of so early an hour, a fact which conclusively proved our dire straights.

"Dawn then, good Samus," he said. They bowed, and the gentleman farmer took his leave.

"Put out that fire," were the wizard's first words to me. He scratched his neck below the beard. "Interesting. Your fall shortened our negotiations considerably—yet favorably. Mayhaps there is a way we can even get your clumsiness to work for you. We'll make a wizard of you yet!" He clapped me on the shoulder. "I have to check my scrolls. Clean up in here. We start work all too early on the morrow."

(II)

"Illusions can be created in multitudinous forms, and vary in effectiveness to the degree your customer wishes to be fooled."
—*The Teachings of Ebenezum*, Vol. 12

"IF MY CALCULATIONS be right." Ebenzum said with a tug at his beard, "the farm should be over the next rise."

I silently thanked all the gods, few though they were, who looked kindly on sorceror's assistants. Ebenezum

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had loaded such a variety of magical paraphernalia into the pack on my back that I was near to doubled over with the weight. Only my stout oak staff kept my head from reaching my feet, and even that sturdy wood seemed to bend considerably every time I leaned against it.

Ebenezum studied my discomfort for a moment, then raised his hand in the way he does when on the verge of a great pronouncement.

"Remember, Wunt," he said. "The total sorceror must develop both mind *and* body." He waved me to follow him with an ease of motion made possible by the fact that he carried nothing at all.

We reached the top of the hill. There was the farm, laid out before us in the full colors of dawn. The light hurt my eyes.

"Come, come, good Wunt!" Ebenezum called as he started down the hill. "Granted that the hour is ungodly. Still, this is a small job at best, finished before the end of morning." He tugged his beard again. "What could it be? Some crops trampled, a few animals loose from their pens? A minor elemental, at worst!"

The beard-fingers came free to wave in the air. "There is, of course, the matter of the dead sow. In my opinion, however, that turn of events was as much the sow's fault as the elemental's. In all, an easy day's work!"

Despite my back, I must admit that it cheered me to see Ebenezum once again embarking on a professional errand. A few mystic passes, a quick spell, and the sprite would be on its way. Even Ebenezum should be able to manage that before his malady overtook him. And that meant money in the coffers, not to mention an opportunity to reconfirm a reputation.

There were certain malicious types in the local mystical community who claimed that Ebenezum's wizardry was done. Just jealous of his great power, they were. Certainly, the outcome of Ebenezum's recent battle with that major demon of the third Netherhell had had its unfortunate side. The demon had, of course, been removed. Quite possibly destroyed. But the highly charged struggle had had its effect on the wizard as well. He had emerged from his trance to discover that he had developed an aversion to all things sorcerous. In fact, any great concentration of magicks would cause Ebenezum to go into an uncontrollable fit of sneezing.

A misfortune of this type might have totally defeated a lesser mage, but not Ebenezum. He had immediately set to discovering strategies in which he might use his malady to advantage.

All thoughts of magicians and misfortunes fled from my morning-dulled head, however, when I saw the girl.

I was to discover, when we were at last introduced, that she was farmer Samus' daughter, Alea. But what need had I for names? The vision of her alone was enough to keep me for the rest of my waking moments. Her skin was the color of young peaches plucked fresh from the tree and highlighted by the colors of dawn. Her hair took the color of sunlight breaking through the clouds after a spring rain. The rest of her? How could I possibly describe the rest of her?

"Wunt!" Ebenezum called over his shoulder. "Are you coming, or have you decided to grow roots?"

I hoisted my pack more firmly on my shoulders and hurried after him, never taking my eyes from the girl. Perhaps I might talk to her. And then, of course, there were touching,

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and kissing, and other activities of a similar nature.

"Ho!" Ebenezum called. I dragged my eyes away from perfection to discover he wasn't calling me at all. Rather, he was hailing a small knot of men involved in animated discourse slightly up the road.

The group turned to look at us. There were four of them. From their drag garb, I guessed three of them to be farmers. Probably hired hands or sharecroppers for the richer Samus. Two of these were virtually identical in appearance. Short and broad, their shoulder width close to their height, they both wore caps, earth colored like the rest of their garments, pulled close to their eyes. One of them picked at his teeth with a dirty fingernail. The other absently twirled a finger about in his ear. Beside this, they were mirror images.

The third hand was thinner, taller and younger than the other two; close to my age and height. Of course, he did not carry himself with one-tenth my stature, but what can you expect of farmers? Besides this, his eyes were much too small, brown bugs darting about in his face. Altogether not a fit companion for the young lady in the nearby field.

Now that I had suitably disposed of the first three, I turned my attention to the last member of the group. He was dressed differently, even flambouyantly, his coat a riot of red and blue, his pantaloons a yellow-green. And the conical black cap that rose at an angle above his head of curly red hair carried a seal. The seal of the magician's guild. I turned to Ebenezum.

He waved an arm clad in the much more respectable royal blue, inlaid with threads of gold, in the other's direction. "A merchant mage," he said, his voice heavy with distaste. "Sometimes you just can't avoid them."

The gaudily glad pretender to the sorcerous arts bowed low as we approached. "Greetings, fellow practitioners!" he called behind a smile that cut across the lower third of his face. "I am Glauer, master magician."

Although the merchant stood a good two inches taller than my master, Ebenezum still managed to stare down at him. "Ebenezum," he said, his tone quiet and clear in its authority, "and Wuntvor, his apprentice."

"Ebenezum," Glauer whispered, and his eyes shifted away for a minute, stunned by the presense of so great a mage. But his gaze snapped back just as quickly, his eyes filled with a cunning that brought new meaning to his merchant smile. Glauer had heard the rumors.

"I have been talking to these good citizens," the merchant continued, his voice, if possible, even bolder and more brash than before. "They tell me that their employer is having a bit of trouble with the spirits. 'Tis probably far too small a matter for one of your emminence, but I thought I might offer my humble assistance."

"Magician Glauer," Ebenezum intoned in a voice so powerful that it caused the farmhands to take a few steps back from the merchant. "These are my people. They are my trust. No task is too large, nor too small, where the people of this village are concerned!"

Glauer stepped closer, his voice and expression both subdued. "I meant no disrespect, sir. We in the profession must do everything we can to help one another. I have heard of your recent misfortunes, and would like to offer my not insubstantial services. Very discreetly, of course. And for the meerest portion of the fee you

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will receive from the grateful farmer. Come now!" He touched my master's deep blue sleeve. "Surely you could use my services?"

"Services?" Ebenezum shook away the other man's hand, his voice full of wizardly rage. "I can think of nothing of yours we can use. We have no need at the moment for pots or pans!"

He turned towards the others. "Now, can someone tell us where we might find Master Samus?".

The thin hand pointed. "He'll be in the main house, beyond the barn there."

Ebenezum nodded and strode briskly towards the main house, leaving me hard pressed to keep up. Behind us I could hear the twin laughter of teeth and the ear, and I imagined the merchant still scowled in our direction. The other man seemed not to have reacted one way or the other to the incident. Rather, the last time I glimpsed him, he had stared thoughtfully off towards the horizon.

We rounded the barn enclosure and spied the great stone house, closer to a mansion than a cottage, with a bit of a fortress thrown in for good measure. The place looked as if it had been built to withstand any discretion of man or nature. It occurred to me that there was only one power that the formidable structure was not proof against; magic.

Shutters banged open on an upper story, and Samus' balding head appeared between two elaborately carved gargoyles. "Good! Good!" he cried. "I'll be down immediately!"

"You must be the magicians," a voice said behind us. A voice, which at the very least combined the sweetest notes ever sung by nightbirds with the fluid music of a forest stream. I turned to see the young woman of the field. The pack I had been removing from my back slipped and threatened to fall. Whether it was my quick move or the moisture that had suddenly appeared on my palms where I gripped the straps, I do not know, but what was apparent was the imminent breakage of many arcane and irreplaceable pieces of sorcerous equipment on the stone steps on which we stood. I tried to juggle the load back to balance, but it was beyond me. The pack fell. If not for the quick moves of Ebenezum, who worked with the speed known only to magicians and others familiar with sleight-of-hand, the box would have met stone and sure destruction.

I turned and smiled at the girl. Her look of alarm over recent events turned to a smile in return. Behind me. Ebenezum said something that I did not quite catch, save that the tone was rather harsh in the presense of one as perfect as the loveliness approaching.

"Rather a close call," she said softly. Her lips made each word a beautiful experience.

I waved aside her concerns. " 'Tis nothing. Are we not magicians? A wave of our hands, and the box would fall up!" A good choice of words, that. Her eyes grew wide with wonder.

I became aware of other voices. One was that of Samus. "This is Alea, my only daughter." "Most pleased," said my master, and I lost the blue of her eyes for a minute as she acknowledged the mage. Fortunately, they returned to me almost immediately, and my world was whole again.

Someone was calling my name. Repeatedly.

"Wunt!" It was Ebenezum. I nodded vaguely in his direction. "Master Samus is taking me on an inspection of his lands, so that I might see the affected areas for myself. If you could

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manage it, I would like you to set up our equipment just inside the barn."

"The barn?" I said, unable to take my eyes away from Alea. "Very good."

"Yes, the barn! This very minute!"

That broke the spell for a second. I glanced at my master (avoiding the eyes) and grabbed my pack and staff.

"Would you like me to show you the way?" Alea said. Her hand brushed against mine, cool and light.

I smiled and nodded and we walked the twenty paces to the livestock enclosure.

A graceful finger pointed to one of the pens. "That's where the hog was killed. We found him dead one dawn, wedged between two fence slats." I nodded, savoring every word. Each of her inflections was like a minstrel song.

We walked in silence for a minute. "How do you find farm life?" I said, mostly to hear her voice again.

The corners of Alea's mouth turned down, bringing a charming wistfulness to her face. "Mosttimes, dull," she said. "Life is slow out here; full of chores and the same old faces. It is not one tenth so interesting, I am sure, as your exciting life in the village."

I shrugged. "I suppose so. Still, you have the open air and the friendship of the others working on the farm, don't you?"

"Ah, Wuntvor, there are some things that the air cannot give you. As to the others, all Father ever thinks of is money. Two of our hands, Frinak and Franik, they're brothers, you know, they're nice, but—frankly—they're rather simple. And as to the other hand . . . " She sighed.

"The other hand?" I prompted, hoping that my interest in the matter was not too obvious.

"Tollar? He's sweet, I guess, in a way. A little coarse, of course. He's very taken with me, you know. He even asked for my hand in marriage. Of course, that would never do. As father is continually reminding me, Tollar is far below my station."

She touched my elbow. "If we turn here, we can enter the back door of the barn." She led me around a corner of the weathered wooden structure. She held my arm firmly now. "There's a hay loft that I think you'll be particularly interested in."

I was looking at her, and so did not see the foot until it struck me on the forehead. I stumbled against her but managed to keep from falling. She hugged me suddenly and strong, an action I found delightfully surprising until I saw the reason for it. The foot that hit me belonged to Tallor, the third hand, or at least what was left of him. His body hung from the rafters, strangely dark and bloated.

"Perhaps," I whispered, "we should go out and find my master."

Alea agreed that that was a very good idea. Neither of us particularly cared to pass beneath the corpse again, so that we decided to walk as quickly as possible through the barn's all-too-dark interior. Holding each other as tightly as movement would allow, we began our flight through the shadowed recesses to the small square of light at the other end.

Then came the banging in the loft, so loud that we would have heard it even if we hadn't lost the power to speak (and possibly to breathe). We ran.

Out into the sunlight. Both of us, shouting at the top of our voices. Out to the approaching Samus and Ebenezum, both clearly astonished at our behavior.

"Is there something wrong?"

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Ebenezum inquired.

"Magic!" Alea said.

Ebenezum pulled at his beard. "If so, it will be the first I've seen today. Come. Show us this sorcery."

We led them back to the barn. As we walked, I told the wizard about the strangely altered farm hand.

"But you say there's been no sorcery?" I asked.

"Nary a twitch." Ebenezum rubbed his nose.

"But Farmer Samus—"

The mage cut me off with a wave of his palm. "There is more here than is apparent to the eye."

We turned the corner of the barn. The doorway was empty. The body was gone.

"Obviously," Ebenezum added.

"What are you trying to do, daughter?" Samus exploded.

"But Tallor!" Alea said. "And the noise—"

Ebenezum raised his hand for silence. There were still noises inside the barn.

"What does this mean?" Samus asked.

The mage's hand went even father up in the air. He sneezed.

Two figures could be seen in silhouette as they escaped through the far door of the barn.

"Sorvery!" Ebenezum cried.

"Those two, running?" the farmer asked.

"No, closer! Much closer." The wizard's sleeve flew to his nose. He lowered it after a moment. "That's better. Near this door. A recent spell, but minor at best." He turned to me. "Describe what happened again."

I retold the story carefully, point by point; the foot. Alea and then me seeing the body with the odd distortions.

Alea began to sob. "Poor Tallor. What did he do to deserve this? He might have been beneath my station, but he was sweet."

I put my hand on her shoulder to comfort her. Samus glared at me rather pointedly. I took my hand away.

Samus looked at my master. "But what about the body?"

Ebenezum sniffed, "Oh, I expect we'll see it again, sooner or later."

Alea's tears broke out anew.

"I believe the best course would be to explore our surroundings," Ebenezum continued, already walking out of the barn, "and interview everyone we meet."

Especially anyone traveling in pairs, I silently added. I retrieved my staff. I might have need of it.

We met the two other hands at the edge of the pens. They were herding a small flock of sheep into one of the enclosures.

"Franik!"

One hand looked up. "Yes, Master Samus?"

"Have you seen anyone pass here?"

The hand's broad brow wrinkled. He took his finger from his ear to scratch at his receding hairline. "Anyone? Since when, master?"

"Any strangers, then?"

"Strangers?"

"Two of them!" Samus was getting a bit red in the face.

"Let's see. Not that I can recall. Wait a minute. Frinak?"

"Yes, brother?"

"Did you see anyone?"

"Any strangers? Not that I can recall. Leastways, not today. As I remember, someone new passed by a week ago Tuesday. Would that be any help? Don't get many new faces around here."

This was getting us nowhere. There was obviously only one pair of men

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unaccounted for anywhere around the farm. I decided to take a more direct approach.

I stepped forward, pointing my staff at the two villians.

"What were you two doing in the barn?"

That startled them. "In the barn?" one of them said (I think it was Franik). "We do all sorts of things in the barn."

"That's true. We bail hay."

"Feed the stock."

" 'Course we shovel manure." They both made a face—the same one. "That job always takes too long. Be surprised how much manure just one horse or cow can come up with. Some of them not even full grown, either."

"No!" I said, frantic to end this line of conversation. "Not what do you do when you're in the barn. *When* were you in the barn?"

"Oh, all sorts of times. Days, nights. Can't tell, exactly."

I rapped my staff on the poached earth. "No! When were you in there *last?*" My brow was getting moist from the mental exertion. Were they going to thwart me in front of my master? In front of Alea?

Even worse, could they really be innocent?

My questioning was cut short by a clatter on the road. I looked past the hands. Whatever made the noise was hidden by a copse of trees.

"Aha!" Ebenezum cried. "I thought he'd show himself eventually! Quick, Wunt! Through those trees!" I followed him at a good trot into the woods.

The trees soon thinned to bushes, and the shrubbery boarded a road. A wagon was leaving a hiding place of overgrown greenery, making for the mud path that passed for a country highway.

"Quick, Wunt! They mustn't get away!"

I sprinted ahead as the wagon turned onto the lane. It was brightly painted in red and yellow, drawn by a single horse whose harness was decorated with multi-colored plumes. Large letters on the side proclaimed "The Great Glauer, Magician-at-Large."

I put on extra speed and darted in front of the horse. "Stop!" I cried and raised my staff. "If you value your safety!"

The staff almost dropped from my hands. There, on the wagon seat, was Glauer, reins in hand. But next to him sat the unexpected. Tolar. Alive.

Well, we had faced worse things than reanimated corpses. Or so I told myself at the moment. I reaffirmed my grip on the staff, ready to thwack anyone who made a move against me.

"Oh, Fesnard Encundum!" Glauer said in a peeved tone. He made a series of three mystic passes.

A spell of entanglement! I tried to fight it off, but the magic was already at work in my system. My arms wrapped around my body, reaching with intertwined fingers for the legs which in turn sought my chin. Soon, I would be caught in a hopeless knot!

Ebenezum stepped in front of the carriage. "Stop, knave!" he cried. "You'll not find me so easy to deal with!"

Was there going to be a magician's duel? I watched helplessly from my prison of arms and legs.

"Wait!" It was Tallor speaking. "Everything can be explained!"

Ebenezum stopped himself mid-gesture and wiped his nose, his hands ready to conjure should there be any treachery.

"This is my fault entirely,' Tollar said. "It's all for Alea. I couldn't live

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without her. Oh, she's friendly enough. I'll grant that. But she wouldn't marry me. Her father insists that I am beneath her station!"

He hit the wooden seat beside him with his fist. "Beneath her station! I couldn't bear it! I decided to take matters into my own hands. I'd arrange for certain small disasters to occur. When Samus was convinced that he was cursed, I would bring Glauer in. And circumstances would present themselves so that Glauer could remove the curse only with my help. I would be a hero. Perhaps enough of a hero to marry Alea.

"The plan was a good one. Samus is notoriously tight. Even with a curse, I figured he would not pay for a magician with a stature greater than Glauer's!" The last remark warranted a vitriolic look from the merchant.

"But," Tollar continued, "as fortune would have it, Samus heard that Ebenezum's rates had declined. To get a sorceror of his reputation for little more than Glauer was a bargain even Samus couldn't pass. It was hopeless—unless we moved quickly and put our plan into effect before Ebenezum could interfere.

"The barn was the best place; in the midst of the farm, yet our actions would be hidden. What better place to come up with a quick supernatural explanation, not to mention a magical cure?

"And all would have gone well, if you hadn't stumbled on me before we were ready."

Tollar's bloated body returned to my mind's eye. "But your—"

"Simple hallucination spell," Ebenezum muttered.

"Well, I had to think fast!" Glauer barked. "You can't expect a masterpiece every time!"

"Master—" Ebenezum growled, but stopped to let Tollar finish his tale.

"Once you'd spotted us, the game was over. I decided we should leave as quietly as possible. However, we failed even there."

"Little wonder," Ebenezum said, glaring at the other magician.

"That does it!" Glauer screamed. "I'll not suffer humiliation at the hands of a mage who has lived off his reputation for the past twenty years!"

"What?" Ebenezum quickly returned his hands to gesture position.

"I have resources far beyond your imagination, mage!" Glauer shouted. "My plan was brilliant, dazzling in scope!" He pulled a large bottle, mottled blue and green, from behind the seat of the cart. "Would you expect a minor magician to control such as this?"

Ebenezum's hands dropped to his sides. "Netherhells, man! You know not what you hold!"

Glauer smiled at that. "Quite the contrary. I know its power, and its risk."

Tollar and I looked from one magician to the other. Tollar said it first: "What is it?"

Glauer held it aloft, the better for all to see. "Bottled demon."

"Put it down, man!" Ebenezum urged. "If it gets loose it might devour us all."

Glauer's smile got broader still. "What? The great magician is afraid? What will people say, when Glauer defeats a demon the great Ebenezum was afraid to face?"

With that, he pulled the cork from the bottle.

And a demon materialized in our midst. Short, squat, the color of dirty brick. He appeared to be a bit musclebound, although it just may have been that he had four arms

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where most of us have two.

"Good afternoon," the creature said in a voice of cultured gravel. "Dinner time."

"He must be contained!" Ebenezum cried, clutching his nose.

"Contained?" Glauer waved the bottle. "I thought that was part of the enchantment. The fellow who sold me this bottle assured me . . . "

"Tasty, tasty morsels," the demon said, allowing its head to circle completely around and survey each of us in turn. It stopped when it saw me. "Entangled. How nice. A quick bite."

It stepped towards me.

Glauer continued to make a series of gestures towards the creature, none of which seemed to have any effect at all. Tollar mentioned something about it being high time he sought his fortune in the west and sprinted into the fields. Ebenezum waved his hand towards me just before he sneezed. I was free! I grabbed my staff and jumped to my feet.

"Come now, lad," the demon said. "Let's not be difficult. Just one swallow. You'll like it in my stomach. They tell me it's quite colorful." It took another step forward.

I hit the top of its head as hard as I could with my staff.

"Upstart!" The creature's eyes filled with demonic anger. "It would have been so easy. A simple swallow! Now, I'll be forced to chew!"

It lunged for me. My feet, seeking to get as far and fast as possible, tripped. I fell. The creature's claws swept the air above me. I managed to rap its head with my staff again. The demon screamed in a rage beyond the human as Ebenezum shook his head briskly and managed a quick breath. He mumbled a few quick words before the sneezing started again. The demon was pulled away from me by invisible forces.

"Magicians!" The demon spun to face the other two; Ebenezum caught in a sneezing fit, Glauer lost in his ineffectual gestures.

"You!" It pointed at Glauer, who, after all, was the only one currently involved in anything vaguely sorcerous. "I'll teach you to come between me and my dinner!"

"Stop, demon!" Glauer shrieked. He waved interlocked fingers at the creature as he stamped his right foot in a peculiar rhythm. It appeared to do as little good as anything he had done before.

The demon's tail flicked with irritation. "Must we be so tiresome?" It surveyed the merchant mage, a forked tongue passing over crooked fangs. "Yes, you'll do quite nicely."

"Hold!" Glauer said, changing his gestures. "I am not the great magician here!"

"Really?" the demon said as it strolled towards its snack. "And who is? Perhaps," it gestured towards Ebenezum, "that pitiful human lost in a sneezing fit?"

Glauer gave up his gestures altogether. The demon was upon him. "Wait!" he cried. His voice was getting higher by the word. "My resourses are virtually without limit. Perhaps I have something to offer you."

"Most assuredly." The demon reached for him. " 'Tis called a full stomach."

"But . . . "

"Alas, magician. We all have our bad days." It swallowed Glauer with rather more noise than was necessary.

The creature wiped its fangs with the back of a clawed hand, then turned to face Ebenezum and me. "Who's next?"

Ebenezum took a deep breath. A

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dozen words flew from his mouth, his hands dancing around them.

The demon began to fade. It looked down at its disappearing form. "Oh, drat!" it said. "And me without a decent meal in eight hundred years! Ah, well." It waved in our direction. "Perhaps we shall meet again, my tastey tidbits. Ta ta—for now."

Its words hung in the now empty air, only a faint sulphur smell left behind. Ebenezum had a final sneezing fit, then was able to breathe again.

Alea ran towards us out of the woods, followed by Samus walking at a more leisurely pace. She rushed straight to me, saying how worried she had been and how brave I was. After so arduous a day, I decided that I could stand there for a moment and absorb the praise.

"What happened?" Samus asked as he approached Ebenezum.

The wizard shrugged his sleeves out to a more respectful position before looking the gentleman farmer in the eye. "Alas," he said. "Poor Glauer. He let the bottle get the better of him."

(III)

"There is nothing so rewarding as a day's work well done, save perhaps for a full stomach with a warm fire, a purse full of gold, or a three day vacation in the pleasure gardens of Vushta."
—*The Teachings of Ebenezum,* Vol. 23

EBENEZUM had gone into the great house with Samus to explain what had happened on the farm, as well as to demand a larger fee (It *had* been a demon, after all!). So it was that I found myself alone with Alea again. I must admit, had it not been for her presense, I would have long since quit this dismal countryside.

I walked with her in silence around the farm, caught in her fragile web of beauty. She took my hand at last and led me to the door of the barn, the place where we had first come together—unpleasant though the initial circumstances might have been. Now, with all sorcery fled, the enclosure was a different place, filled with quiet dark and the soft smell of hay. I looked into Alea's face, the lines even more graceful in shadow.

"Alea," I said, my voice stuck in my throat. "Do you think that—the two of us . . ."

She laughed; the wind through a mountain stream. "Dear Wuntvor! I'm afraid that's impossible. Father would never allow it. You are far beneath my station."

My world fell away from me. Agony stabbed my chest. My eyes searched the straw-strewn floor for answers.

Alea pulled my hand. I blindly followed. She spoke brightly. I forced myself to make sense of the words.

"—and I want to show you the hay loft. It's very comfortable. And very private."

She turned to me, her eyes catching mine. "Father conducts my formal affairs. He pays no attention to my recreation."

She smiled a tiny smile and led me to a ladder in the hay strewn dark.

I began to see some advantages to the farming life.

—CRAIG SHAW GARDNER

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PRIDEY GOETH

DAVID R BUNCH

They thought they were getting a Good Thing. They should have known better . . .

I DO NOT KNOW if the proud vain people of the little city of Pridey would have done this thing if they had known, but I suppose that they would have—yes, I suppose that, singly and severally, they would have done it. Yes. But after they were in such a mess, I am sure they wished they had not done it. But did they admit it? Well—not really, not at first, not to anybody except maybe in their own minds when they couldn't avoid it. And naturally there were times when they couldn't avoid it. Like when they'd arise of mornings say, and all of a sudden without any advance notice whatsoever start spitting, copiously and brilliantly, bright personal blood in the wash basin; or their backs would start to flip-flip where those queer things—definitely not wings—were growing; or the bones would start to feel not like bones at all, but like sponge rubber. Suppose, for instance, you felt like you had rubber bones holding you up, or rubber bones filling out your toes when you went to kick at a cat, and all the time you were coughing and bleeding and feeling your back erupt with strange sprouting—it'd be pretty hard, wouldn't it, not to be sorry?

But perhaps you couldn't admit that you were sorry, because there'd be tradition to hold up and the need to smile. Smile *Smile*, put out that stiff upper lip and make the best of a bad situation—always. It's the human way, the blessed, brave and sometimes entirely stupid Human Way, and everyone knows it. And besides, not just anybody knew that almost everybody else was spitting blood, growing flip-flips on the back and having that rubberized-bone kind of feeling about half of the blessed time. In fact not anyone at first knew that anyone else was doing it, because they were all ashamed of it, they tried to hide it, they smiled Smiled *Smiled* and put on that stiff-upper-lip act like a boy scout waving signal flags of reassurance toward the good kind of wholesome life in the little city of Pridey.

And how did this thing happen anyhow? It happened because a mild-eyed tame-haired sort of dreaming little man, with a briefcase under each arm, came to Pridey one windy awful day under cover of a dark sky in the fall and offered to sell a man a deal, a bottled kind of deal. He offered to make the man more virile, much stronger, a lot handsomer, with more hair, better teeth, faster eyes, with a chance to have brighter children and enjoy it more while he did it—if he would just invest in a little scientific formula that was all in the bottle, all proved and ready to go. In addition to all this the man would live longer, oh almost forever, if he wanted to. And if the man paid the mild-eyed tame-haired little hustler

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man enough money—approximately all that could be afforded and a little bit more, that is—the investing kind of man would be the only man in Pridey to have the advantages of this magical scientific fantastical formula, it was a promise. And so it was done and believed, the deal consummated, and the investing dupe-type man closed out his bank account, borrowed a little on the side and did just about every stupid-type kind of thing to prove that he, a practical-type man otherwise, believed in the magical way. On top of all that, he proved that he wanted to get ahead of his neighbors and be more virile, much stronger, a lot handsomer, with more hair, better teeth, faster eyes, and a chance to have brighter children—than any of them, and enjoy it more while he did it. Also he wanted to live longer while doing it, that was definite. And he was willing to pay a lot for it. *Good man.* Good wanted-to-get-ahead-type man. *Yes!*

And wasn't this OK? Surely. Of course. Naturally. Absolutely. Very fine fine fine . . . *(Oh! Hell! No! It! Wasn't! And you know it. All of you out there know it.)*

And it didn't work anyway. Because the mild-eyed tame-haired dreaming type of man who seemed so fair and promiseful on Wednesday wasn't to be trusted anyway, not on Tuesday or Thursday. Not even on Wednesday, if you want to know it. He was a scientific bum. And he took all kinds of advantages. And he could do it too, because he knew people, and knew their wives too. By putting on disguises, slipping around to back doors, cutting up alleys and meeting some at the curbside and others at the pool side and more at the club, he sold practically everybody in Pridey with hardly anybody knowing that they were any except the one-and-only selected. For they had paid handsomely, yes indeed they had. All the well-to-do up-and-coming proud types at Pridey jumped at the chance to be more virile, much stronger, a lot handsomer, etc.—than anyone else. And thanks to their very active built-in entirely natural and wholly normal human-type gullibility, they believed it, believed it all.

And after he had duped every man of consequence in the little city of Pridey, just to pick up a bit of extra stroll-around jingle-type kind of change-money he went after the women. He sold them the same, the very same, bottle of junky happiness, promising them that they could easily be more passionate in the love nest, more beautiful on the street, more lovable everywhere, have bigger moons on their fingernails, nicer lumps in their brassieres, wear their nylons longer without runs, feel flatter in their girdles in the evening after a big meal and never have to bear any children at all if they didn't want to. Also, they would never have face wrinkles and gray hair, it was a promise.

And why didn't all this work for the good men and the good women of the little city of Pridey? I'll tell you why it didn't work for the good men and the good women of the little city of Pridey. It didn't work because that bottle was full of junk. In fact, it was worse than full of junk. It was full of stuff that was definitely harmful to the human-being-type system. It had been scientifically concocted out of *bad* stuff, like rat poison, fall-out germs, alcohol—yes! it actually was at least 33 1/3% composed of bar-type alcohol—along with a share of good old strontium 90 for better flips, rubber bones and more unexpected

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bleeding at all times. Sure, it gave people a lift at first, because it was devised—scientifically compounded—to do that. And it was fun at first to see people running around on the streets of Pridey, smug, confident, everyone sure that he, or she, was the one-and-only *one*. Didn't the noses go up then and the chests pouter-pigeon out and the brassieres jug up with the very worst side of human vanity! with everyone thinking *I am the one-and-only one with the magic golden apple on a string.*

But see them later in Pridey. Oh, see them! After they found out! After trying to give away their magic apples on a string, so that their neighbors could share a good big solid bite, and finding to their extreme surprise and great astonishment that these apples, these bottles of junky magic really I mean, were almost as common as the common air in Pridey, the good citizens of Pridey gathered for a protest meeting and a misery-loves-company type meeting. Initially there was good down-to-earth revenge-type discussion with people all hot-to-go and get the little super duper who had duped them so. But one woman stopped all that with a sane question-and-answer speech saying, "How could we do that and hope to find him? We couldn't. He's probably preaching now. And besides, anyway, we did it all with our eyes wide open, ourselves." So the debate was directed toward what-is-to-do-now? how-can-we-save-ourselves-now? what-was-our-great-fault-anyway? etc., type questions.

Finally, along toward nightfall, with the strange flips—they definitely were not wings—writhing and wriggling under the clothes on backs, with the crowd swaying and staggering on rubbery-bone legs and with the blood coming up, copious and bright, in brilliant hemorrhages at unexpected times, the discussion swung toward a pretty obvious and also a greater thing: "Since we can't save ourselves, can we leave a monument?"

It was finally decided, albeit reluctantly, that they couldn't leave a monument, because there wasn't time. Furthermore it was finally decided, albeit very reluctantly, that considering the time element, and due to the shape things were in, to just go ahead home and die was probably the best move, the only move really. And everyone would just have to accept it. So after some Hail Marys, a couple of short group prayers and enough hymn sings to bolster everyone a little, they turned to go. And leaving they called out, with a little left, let's admit it, of the best of the terrible human pride, "Have a good death now. Chin up. Be brave about things. Don't snivel. We made a mistake. But we wouldn't do it again, would we? We learned our lesson, didn't we?" (Oh ho no, wouldn't they! ?? do it again? If they thought they could win?) *Ha!*

And they did leave a monument. The little city of Pridey, they left that. Where not even the animals live and roam now. Because the animals, the poor, innocent, greedy, flesh-driven animals—after the children and the few grown-ups who had not purchased the bottles had fled in a horrible crazed exodus—those animals ate the dead people of the little city of Pridey. And those poor, innocent, greedy, flesh-driven animals got, at second hand, a little of that terrible formula. And that was all for Pridey. Shed a tear, say a prayer, for Pridey. Hoo! Boo! Boo-hoo! and *Boo!!*

—DAVID R. BUNCH

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Editorial (cont. from page 4)
what they are now: as fully intelligent, creative, and sensitive as people are today (which is to say that some were more intelligent, creative, or sensitive than others, and some were less so).

And as imaginative.

Our imagination comes from what Freud called the "unconscious mind," that storehouse of half-forgotten memories and experiences, from whence comes our feelings and emotions, our drives and desires.

We are—still—the creatures of our unconscious minds. When we behave rashly or irrationally, we blame it on our unconscious minds as if one's unconscious was an unruly miscreant and should be kept under tight control. Yet the unconscious is the fountain from which everything that enriches our lives flows—love, joy, delight, awe. . . .

In pre-conscious times, the theory goes, we did not recognize the promptings of our unconscious minds as "hunches" or "intuition;" instead we externalized these sudden revelations that seemed to pop into our thoughts without bidding: we regarded them as communications of "spirits," and God spoke to us, directly as He did to Moses. . . . Indeed, much of religion can be understood far better in these terms. (There is a theme which runs through much of the Bible: Once we existed on terms of familiarity with our God or gods, but as time went on He—they—spoke directly to us less and less, and then only to fewer of us. . . . This can be interpreted quite readily as the growing sophistication of our psyches, the growth of consciousness and skepticism, which blocked off the direct communication of our unconscious minds to us.)

Today we have reached the opposite state. Culturally, we "believe" only in our conscious minds. We distrust our unconscious minds and ignore them. We exalt rationality, "reasonableness," and mechanical consistency. We have made ourselves as much like the machines that dominate our lives as we can.

Much that is wrong with the present world can be laid at the door of this exclusive concentration of our conscious minds. The flaws and faults of every current political system in use today can be traced to this root cause. Systems and "-isms" all reflect an attempt to "perfect" humanity, to "breed" or "educate" us into becoming completely rational and totally divorced from our feelings—especially those which are inconvenient (or worse) to the system. In the 18th and 19th centuries rationality was seen as the end result of a humanity evolved to perfection. Our country was founded on the notion of perfectable human rationality. So was Marxist Russia.

It doesn't work. It has never worked. And until we begin to understand who and what we are—as *total* human beings—it will never work. We are complex creatures, responding to an incredible variety of stimuli, often at cross-purposes, and rarely understood. Most of what we are, as human beings, exists in our unconscious—not the surface layer of consciousness.

And that brings us—at last—back to fantasy.

Fantasy didn't exist until we externalized it, until we denied its internal reality within us.

When Homer told the Odyssey he was not deliberately creating a work of fantasy. To him and to his audience he was recounting a history, and the fact that it existed primarily in metaphor rather than factual realism was of little if any importance. The metaphor was revelent. When the Greek Chorus spoke on one side of the stage it was not seen as an artificial device of the play's author—it was an approximation (as was everything in the drama) of a metaphorically perceived reality. Life was not neatly

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sorted out into the real and the unreal. There was the Known and there was the Unknown—which covered an infinitely vaster territory and was no less "real" for that.

Science is the discipline of the conscious mind. It reflects the arrogant human belief that everything is (or *ought to be)* knowable. Its basic postulate used to be that once we know something, we understand it, and once we understand it we can control it. Even today this belief is widespread, although less in the scientific community than among the lay public. Scientists are well aware, today, that each new discovery only underscores our vast ignorance and incomprehension—that we "know" only a portion of our own backyard and will never ever be able to "know" the whole.

For at least two centuries we rode a crest of optimism: utopia—a scientific, *rational* utopia—was just around the corner. Someday machines would do all the work and mankind would be freed from slavery. In the last ten to thirty years this optimism has crumbled. When we opened the Pandora's Box of nuclear fission we looked into a vast void of incomprehensibility. Our fixed world of rationality crumbled. There is no longer a "smallest particle," and indeed we can't tell anymore where particles (matter) leave off and waves (energy) begin. The more we've pried into the universe's secrets, the less defined and rational those "secrets" have become. We stand now poised at the brink of chaos in nearly every aspect of human affairs.

Fantasy reflects our societal and cultural schizophrenia. Until we denied the internal metaphors and turned our back on our unconscious selves the creation of fantasy as a literary genre was not possible. Fantasies were written, yes, *but not as fantasies*. It is only hindsight that has identified earlier works as "fantasy".

Today our culture exhibits a vast yearning for a return to a more balanced state. Return to the preconscious state is neither possible nor desireable, but we need better avenues through which to express our feelings, our inner drives. We need new metaphors.

I remarked several years ago here on the anti-technological forces rising in our society as technology was perceived to be the villain rather than the savior in modern life. But technology is only a reflection of the unbridled rationality of conscious minds cut off from their unconsciousness. Technology is only a tool. Its benefit or harm to us lies in the way we use that tool. Our dissatisfactions do not truly lie with technology—who among us could truly do without it?—they lie in our frustrations with the denial of acceptable outlets for our feelings.

The rise in popularity for fantasy over the last two decades—centered on the enormous success for both Tolkein's works and those of Robert E. Howard—parallels the rise of anti-rationality: the rise in occultism, the creation of a drug culture, the rejuvenation of religions. Each of these factors is a symptom of something basic: a yearning for the reintegration of the unconscious and conscious minds in each of us. We need fresh metaphors.

—Ted White

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Marvin Kaye tells us he has a third "Incredible Umbrella" story in the works and you'll be seeing it here soon; in the meantime here's a delightful short story about–

MS. LIPSHUTZ AND THE GOBLIN

MARVIN KAYE

LIPSHUTZ, DAPHNE A., Ms. (age: 28; height: 5 '2 "; weight: 160 lbs.; must wear corrective lenses), had frizzy brown hair, buck teeth, and an almost terminal case of acne. Though her mother frequently reassured her she had a Very Nice Personality, that commodity seemed of little value in Daphne's Quest for The Perfect Mate.

According to Daphne A. (for Arabella) Lipshutz, The Perfect Mate must be 30, about 5'9" in height, weigh approximately 130 pounds, have wavy blond hair (1st preference), white teeth, a gentle smile and peaches-and-cream complexion. He must like children and occasional sex, or if necessary, the other way around.

Daphne's Quest for The Perfect Mate was hampered by her job as an interviewer (2nd grade) for the State of New York, Manhattan division of the Labor Department's Upper West Side office of the Bureau of Unemployment. The only men she met there were sour-stomached married colleagues, or the people she processed for unemployment checks, "and them," her mother cautioned, "you can do without. Who'd buy the tickets, tip the cabbie, shmeer the headwaiter, pick up the check?"

Ms. Lipshutz worked in a dingy green office around the corner from a supermarket. To get there, she had to take a southbound bus from The Bronx, get off at 90th and Broadway and walk west past a narrow, dark alley. Next to it was a brick building with a doorway providing access to steep wooden stairs that mounted to her office. The stairs were worn smooth and low in the middle of each step by innumerable shuffling feet. Daphne noticed that unemployed feet frequently shuffle.

Late one October afternoon, just before Hallowe'en, Ms. Lipshutz was about to take her final coffee-break of the day when an unusual personage entered the unemployment bureau and approached her window. He was six feet eight inches tall and thin as a breadstick. There were warts all over his body, and the color of his skin was bright green.

Ms. Lipshutz thought he looked like the Jolly Green Pickle or an elongated cousin of Peter Pain. He was certainly the ugliest thing she'd ever set her soulful brown eyes on.

Leaning his pointy elbows on her window-shelf, the newcomer glanced admiringly at her acne-dimpled face and asked whether he was in the correct line. He addressed her as Miss.

Bridling, Daphne told him to address her as *Ms.* The tall green crea-

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ture's eyebrows rose.

"Miz?" he echoed, mystified. "What dat?"

"I am a liberated woman," she said in the clockwork rhythm of a civil servant or a missioned spirit. Her vocal timbre was flat and nasal, pure Grand Concourse. "I do not like to be called Miss. If I were married—" (here she betrayed her cause with a profound sigh) "—I would not call myself Mrs. So please call me Ms."

The green one nodded. "Me once had girlfriend named Miz. Shlubya Miz. She great big troll. You troll?"

"This," said Ms. Lipshutz, "is an immaterial conversation. Please state your name and business."

"Name: Klotsch."

"Would you repeat that?" she asked, fishing out an application form and poising a pencil.

"Klotsch."

"First or last?"

"Always!"

Unusual names were common at the unemployment office, and so was unusual stupidity. Ms. Lipshutz patiently explained she wanted to know whether Klotsch was a first or last name.

"Only name. Just Klotsch."

"How do you spell it? Is that C as in Couch?"

"K as in Kill!" Klotsch shouted. "Kill-LOTSCH!"

"Kindly lower your voice," she said mechanically. "I presume you wish to apply for unemployment checks?"

Spreading his warty hands, the big green thing grinned. "Klotsch not come to count your pimples, Miz."

Not realizing the remark was meant flirtatiously, Daphne, who was extremely sensitive about her acne, took offense. "That was a cru-el thing to say!"

"How come?" Klotsch was puzzled. "Me no understand. Klotsch like pimples. You lots cuter than Shlubya the troll!"

Daphne, not very reassured, found it wise to retreat into the prescribed formulae of the State of New York for dealing with an unemployment insurance applicant.

"Now," she began, "Mister Klotsch—"

He waved a deprecatory claw. "No Mister."

"I beg your pardon?"

"You liberated, so okay, Klotsch liberated, too. If you Miz, me *Murr*."

"I see," she said primly, unable to determine whether she was being made fun of. Inscribing Klotsch's name on Form NYS204-A, Ms. Lipshutz requested his address.

"No got."

"You are a transient?"

He shook his shaggy head. "Me are a goblin."

"No, no, Murr Klotsch, we are not up to Employment History yet. Simply state your address."

"Me don't got. Landlady kick me out of cave."

"Oh, dear. Couldn't you pay your rent?"

"Ate landlord," Klotsch glumly confessed.

Daphne suddenly noticed that Klotsch had two lower incisors which protruded three inches north of his upper lip. Civic conscience aroused, she told him eating his landlord was a terrible thing to do.

"Telling me! Klotsch sick three days."

"Do you go round eating people all the time?"

The goblin drew himself erect, his pride hurt. "Klotsch no eat people! Only landlords!"

Ms. Lipshutz conceded the distinction. Returning to the form, she asked

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Klotsch for his last date of employment.

He sighed gloomily. "October 31st, 1877."

Time to be firm: "The unemployment relief act, Murr Klotsch, does *not* cover cases prior to 1932."

"So put down 1932," he suggested. In an uncharacteristic spirit of compromise, Daphne promptly complied. (It was eight minutes before five o'clock).

"Place of previous employment?"

"Black Forest."

"Is that in New York State?"

"Is Germany."

"You may not be aware that the State of New York does not share reciprocity with overseas powers."

Klotsch thought about it briefly, then raised a crooked talon in recollection. "Once did one-night gig in Poughkeepsie."

"Check." She wrote it down. "Previous employer's name?"

"Beelzebub."

Ms. Lipshutz stuck pencil and application in Klotsch's paws. "Here—*you* tackle that one!" While he wrote, she studied him, deciding that, after all, Klotsch wasn't *so* bad looking. He had a kind of sexy expression in his big purple eye.

"And where does this Mist—uh, Murr Beelzebub conduct his business?"

The gobling shrugged. "Usually hangs around Times Square."

"Then he does not maintain a permanent place of business?"

"Oh, yeah: further south." Klotsch shook his large head, scowling. "He no good boss, got all goblings unionized. Me no like. Klotsch work for self."

Ms. Lipshutz muttered something about scabs. Klotsch, misunderstanding, beamed toothily. "Klotsch got plenty scabs. You like?"

Eye on the clock (four of five), Ms. Lipshutz proceeded with her routine. "Have you received any recent employment offers?"

"Just Beelzebub."

"Do you mean," she inquired with the frosty, lofty disapproval of an accredited representative of the State of New York, "that you have refused a job offer?"

"Me no going to shovel coal!" Klotsch howled, eyes glowing like the embers he disdained.

Ms. Lipshutz understood. "So long as the position was not in your chosen professional line." She ticked off another question on the form. "That brings us, Murr Klotsch, to the kind of work you are seeking. What precisely do you do?"

He replied in a solemn guttural tone. "Me goblin."

"What what does that entail?"

By way of demonstration, Klotsch uttered a fearful yell, gnashed his teeth and dashed up and down the walls. He panted, snorted, whistled, screamed, swang from the light fixtures and dripped green on various desks. Ms. Lipshutz's colleagues paid no attention. Worse things happen in Manhattan.

Gibbering his last gibber, Klotsch returned to Ms. Lipshutz's window. "That my Class A material. You like?"

"Interesting," she conceded. "Did you get much call for that sort of thing?"

"Plenty work once! Double-time during day! Klotsch used to frighten farmers, shepherds, even once in a while, genuine hero." He sighed, shrugging eloquently. "But then scare biz go down toilet. They bust me down to kids, then not even them. Too many other scary things nowadays, goblins outclassed."

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She nodded, not without hasty sympathy (two of five). "And have you ever considered changing your profession?"

"Got plenty monsters already in TV, movies, comics."

"What about the armed services?"

Klotsch shook his big green head. "All the best jobs already got by trolls."

Ms. Lipshutz sighed. She would have liked to assist Klotsch, but it was 4:59 and she did not want to miss the 5:03 bus. Setting his form aside for processing the following day, she asked him to return in one week.

The hapless goblin shambled out without another word.

Ms. LIPSHUTZ hurried on her coat and hat, locked up her desk, pattered swiftly down the old stairs to catch the 5:03.

Turning east, she heel-clicked toward Broadway. There was a dark alleyway separating the corner supermarket from the building that housed the unemployment bureau. As she passed it, a great green goblin leaped out at her, whoofling, snorting and howling in outrageous menace.

Daphne nearly collapsed with laughter. She snickered, tittered, chortled and giggled for nearly a minute before gaining sufficient self-control to speak. "Murr Klotsch . . . it's you!"

His face was sad and long. "Miz no scared, she laugh."

"Oh . . . oh, *no*!" Daphne consolingly reached out her hand and touched him. "Murr Klotsch . . . I was so, *so* frightened!"

"Then why you laugh?"

"I was positively . . . uh . . . hysterical with fear!"

The goblin grinned shyly, hopefully. "No kidding?"

"Truly," she declared firmly, coyly adding, "I don't believe my heart will stop pounding until I've had a drink."

So she missed the 5:03 and Klotsch took her to a nearby Chinese restaurant where the bartender mixed excellent zombies. Just as her mother always warned, Daphne was stuck paying the bar bill. But somehow, she didn't mind.

Ms. DAPHNE ARABELLA LIPSHUTZ (age: 28½; weight: 110 lbs., wears contact lenses) wedded Klotsch the following spring despite her mother's protests that she surely could have found a nice Jewish goblin somewhere.

"And what about the children?" she shrilled. "Suppose they resemble their father?"

Daphne shrugged. "He's not bad once you get used to him."

With the combined aid of his wife and the New York State Department of Labor, Klotsch found work in an amusement park fun house, where he made such a hit that a talent scout caught his act and signed him up. Since then, the goblin has made several horror films, appears on TV talk shows (as guest host on one of them), endorses a brand of green toothpaste and is part owner of a line of Hallowe'en masks. The couple moved to the suburbs, where Mrs. Lipshutz often visits her illustrious son-in-law.

The only unfortunate result of their marriage is that it has worked wonders with Daphne's complexion. But Klotsch is too considerate to mention his disappointment.

—MARVIN KAYE

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Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet, and addressed to According to You, *Box 409, Falls Church, Va. 22046*

Dear White:

Your editorials and varia are informative and entertaining—the pieces and letters in Geis' *SFR*, Porter's *Algol*, and now Fratz' *Thrust*. You have a positive genius for initiating brouhahas, and I always find these flaps among literarians enjoyable. Fiction aside, your zines have—from my point of view—the virtue that they are concerned with SF&F and not so much with predictive science and saving the world for humanity, and solving the Great Problems of the Cosmos. The exuberant naivty of writers who have all the answers if only they were listened to in the front office produces a case of the blahs. But perhaps that is what the readers want, a taste of high reality along with their entertainment.

A few words about Arsen Darnay's rather nice "Golden Fleece". The descriptive prose was quite good, vaguely Kiplingesque, as if the narrator were speaking directly to the reader in a confidential and casual fashion. This sort of thing is best done if the author can impart the idea that the information is not being supplied but rather that it is being recalled. The reader is then flattered into accepting the matter more readily, there is a slight infusion of a desirable intimacy between narrator and reader. It seems to me that this is more effective with inexperienced and youthful readers.

While the individual sections of the story were well constructed they did not, in all instances, quite fit together, and a procrustean effort was manifest. While there was an agreed upon set of signals to communicate with Lando, it was later stated that it was not possible to communicate with him about the sale of Lybricum. Early on the reader is convinced that little was known about the storto but later it was stated that there were many publications appearing regularly. The author can't have it both ways and retain the reader's interest. At first the pelts were rare and not to be sold by the concessionaire, while at the end Lando was given one from a huge collection. The change in Lando's position was considerable, hardly to be accounted for in so brief a manner. Why, also, did the concessionaire reconsider his position? Marda, it is made out, is very difficult of access, way off the beaten track, and there seems little point in so elaborate a thing as Marda Station, though this is partially explained as a place for the scientists. Counted as an O. Henry ending it is not planted at all.

ALEXANDER DONIPHAN WALLACE
2119 NW 21 Street
Gainesville, FL 32605

Dear Mr. White:

I wonder just where Michael Ro-

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gers, of the *Rolling Stone*, thinks a writer can practice the serious art of storytelling today.

It's fairly-well known that mainstream-fiction is dead. First, idea went out of style. Second, characterization became passé. Third, plot was cast aside as no longer fashionable. Fourth, delineation of background disappeared. This leaves nothing to maintain life in mainstream-fiction.

There is further evidence. Pulps, once the major source of fiction, are now largely defunct; only a few remain in the mystery and science-fiction fields. Most slick magazines now publish no fiction.

In fact, practicing the serious art of storytelling is almost nonexistant outside of science-fiction.

Then Rogers makes a glaring error, an immense, outrageous blunder, when he defines fiction: "The stuff of life: how we react and change in the face of crisis and conflict, and whether that reaction is noble or mean." This is not fiction, but only a single aspect of fiction—theme. And theme is a pretty distant runner-up in the elements of fiction; it must always finish far up-the-track after Plot, Characterization, Background, Idea, and such. While it is occasionally an outstanding part of fiction, usually it is quite minor, and in many cases not revelant at all.

Again, Rogers shows his ignorance when he says:

"Science-fiction, however, allows one to arbitrarily establish and then alter the environment of one's characters—to change, on command, the very nature of their reality. So when one's character is stuck in a terrible bind, instead of doing the hard and honorable thing, i. e., showing how that terrible bind alters the character, one will instead (writers being the lazy creatures we are) change the ground rules of the surrounding reality. Suddenly there will be a new invention, a new weapon, a previously unrevealed characteristic of the alien ecology, one or all of which promptly acts to save the endangered character's bacon, at no cost to the character itself.

"In short, for writers, science fiction is cheating—the easy way out of facing real human dilemmas.

"I was already midway through my first novel, an incontrovertibly science-fictionish story in which the protagonist was, on several occasions, plucked from disaster by the unexpected intervention of dubious and nonexistant technology."

Rogers wrongly assumes that simply because his grad-student friends follow this line of reasoning it is automatically true. And he further incorrectly assumes that just because he makes these mistakes in writing science-fiction everybody else does too.

I wish he'd do us a favor and send his "SF novel" along to you, so you can print it; I'd really like to see it.

I also wonder about his graduate-student friends in creative writing. From the way he describes them, it appears they have no connection to, or knowledge of, the prosaic real-world of fiction. Suggested is the impression that they are a group of lofty, avant-garde idealists, imagining themselves to be ultra-literate, with their heads stuck up above the clouds, exchanging snide, inept dialogues of tribulation on the human-psyche, and holding profound, lengthy debates about merging flashback with stream-of-consciousness.

LEE SMITH
410 Claremore
33401

Dear Ted:

What a shock! I've just seen the winter issue of FANTASTIC. Really, I had to look twice to assure myself it *was* FANTASTIC. It's gone sf again.

I'm one who'll really regret the change. It was the sword and sorcery orientation of FANTASTIC that made it

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different from its competitors. Where are we loyal fans of s&s to go now, but to a few original book anthologies and reprints?

Let me say I understand economic reasons are behind the change. It is known sf sells better than s&s. (As one who not only reads s&s but also writes it, I've never understood this.) But yet. . .

This is not a notice that I'll stop reading FANTASTIC. The increase in FANTASTIC's circulation is important for its health, so I can accept the change. But the loss of such an important forum for new s&s leaves a great gap in American popular literature.

G. ARTHUR RAHMAN
R1 Box 140
Theilman, MN 55978

Although we dropped the line "Sword & Sorcery and Fantasy" from under our logo and "Swords & Sorcery and other Fantasies" from our spine with our September, 1977 issue, that's been about the only real change that's occurred. Good s&s *fantasy has never been easy to find and we've rarely published more than one such story an issue. We* have *begun publishing some science fiction here—but again, only about one story per issue.* FANTASTIC *remains a* fantasy *magazine (although my definition of fantasy includes stf) and we will continue to publish stories from the entire broad spectrum of fantasy here—including sword & sorcery stories, whenever good ones come in. We remain "an important forum for new* s&s," *and hope to continue to be one for a long time to come.*—TW

Dear Mr. White,

Floating somewhere around here is the first draft of a letter praising the January AMAZING. I don't think I ever finished it. This time I'm ticked off, so naturally I'm gonna *mail* the first draft.

I just read "Knock and See What Enters" by C.L. Grant. Now with all them flashbacks, I have a right to expect to find out sometime or the other why it is that Fallco is standing there with two bodyguards and no recording equipment when he doesn't want the guards and does want the equipment, I am led to feel that the fact that he is under guard is somehow important, but Grant doesn't even give a hint. I got so distracted over that, that Anubis or whoever wasn't much of a surprise.

Concerning "Hark! Was that the squeal of an Angry Thoat?" : I've gotten accustomed to monosyllabic words divided at the end of a line and stories that have to be put together like jigsaw puzzles, so accustomed that when I came across the marvelously evocotive phrase "gristly skeleton" in "How Kank Thad Returned to Bhur-Esh" I automatically corrected it to a humdrum "grisly skeleton", but it does seem to me that your typesetter could get the titles right!

Grrumph.

"The Pillars of Hell" reads like a fragment torn from a novel. (Grudging addition: a good novel.)

"The End-of-the-world Rag": The trouble with writing about apathy is, who cares?

"A Trick of the Tail": I *liked* Milhaus' footnotes.

It's a shame about the beautiful tail, but Camel-plop really didn't give them much choice.

"Visitors", Jack Dann: huh?

"Jackson" I was on the verge of a light dismissal—I skimmed the tale, perhaps in reaction to "La Fin" etc. which (on *your* say-so) I tried very hard to make sence of—when it occurred to me that he has conveyed that "innocent" is not a synonym for "harmless", a point worth pondering.

"We Hold These Truths to be Self-Evident": I like a story in which one feels that the principals live on and take part in further interesting events. Interesting to themselves, anyhow.

"Top Hat": a charming ghost.

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"Priapus": I conned the Boss into reading it and didn't get any complaints.

Well, now, I just took a look at the title page & saw that I had covered everything but the letters ("make a clean sweep," says I to me) and I turned to the letters. Concerning the last letter, the one from A. C. Clinton: Well, I came into possession of this copy in the following manner: The Boss wanted something to read. I was going to the drug store and said, "If the new *Galaxy* is in I will get you one." *Galaxy* wasn't in. We already had the latest *Analog*, *F&SF*, and AMAZING.

Harvey doesn't stock *Galileo* & I don't like it anyhow. *Ellery Queen* didn't occur to me.

p. p. s.: Went back to editorial in question: P. 120 June (1977) FANTASTIC, "Why, I'm not too sure." Simple. Fantasy is as much harder to write than S.F. as S.F. is harder to write than mainstream. There just isn't that much good stuff out there.

But try not to go away and leave us at the mercy of the occasional novel.

JOE AGAPI
R.D. 2
Voorheesville, N.Y. 12186

Apparently no one in the typesetting chain believed in the existence of the Martian Thoat—although the typo to "throat" was corrected by our proofreader, the correction was ignored. My apologies to Avram Davidson and to you readers.—TW

Dear Mr. White:

I have been a fantasy devotee for over a decade. Why is it that your magazine did not come to my attention until Fritz Leiber mentioned it to me?

I have always searched the bookstores in whatever location I found myself for just such a periodical. I did not discover it in Bloomington, Illinois, where I did my B.A. (at Illinois State University) nor was it available at Carbondale, where I did graduate work at Southern Illinois University.

If you are having a bit of financial trouble, as your format seems to indicate (a two-page ad for a witchcraft book!), I suggest that you get the circulation department busy analyzing the market. I know of a lot of people at either of the university cities that I lived in who would happily buy your magazine—if they could find copies of it! I obtained my first copy (April, 78) through the kind services of the local bookstore, who special-ordered it for me.

I know that there is a wide market for a fantasy magazine because I have been surveying the market to determine if a mass circulation periodical is feasible. Of the people I sampled, many of those who read FANTASTIC thought that it should delete or seriously reduce the amount of "routine" science-fiction in favor of more fantasy. As I have not yet read my copy, I cannot comment on this; but in passing, let me say that I know of at least 7 good straight science-fiction magazines and no straight fantasy magazine. With the rejuvenated interest in authors such as Robert E. Howard, H.P. Lovecraft, and Clark Ashton Smith, it certainly seems that an ever-growing fantasy market is ripe for service by a periodical restricted to that genre.

ROBERT FESTER
602 White Street
Carmi, Il. 62821

As you correctly point out, the problem is one of connecting *with the "ever-growing fantasy market." I've remarked in these pages more than once on the bottleneck caused by the present newsstand magazine distribution system; suffice to say that it makes an already difficult task almost impossible. We publich no "routine science fiction" here, and until very recently no sf at all; perhaps those you queried were thinking of* The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction—*the only other newsstand-*

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circulated magazine to publish any fantasy. (Years ago the publishers of that magazine discovered that an emphasis on science fiction sold more copies than an emphasis on fantasy did; I suspect this is still true.)—TW

Dear Sir:

There's only a few items in the April 1978 issue of FANTASTIC that stick in my mind. There was nothing wrong with some of them, at least, but they just didn't stick in my mind. Some were incoherent, some were clear, but they were unmemorable. Even Arsen Darnay and Charles Sheffield, whose stories are usually great, just didn't have any effect.

The one story that did have an effect was Michael F. X. Milhaus's "Where Angels Fear to Tread". Except for the third story, all the stories in the series were great. I hope this series keeps on for a while, and I hope Milhaus writes some stories not in the series.

By the way, what has Dennis More been doing since his series about Felimid ended? He was a pretty good new author.

Your editorial was very interesting. It goes well with your column in the June 1977 issue. Now, if I want to draw for AMAZING or FANTASTIC, I know what to do. But I'd rather write.

In a letter of mine you published a while back, I predicted that L. Sprague deCamp's article on Tolkien would start a controversy. But I didn't expect a controversy like the one that's going on. Being born a Catholic, having attended Episcopalian and Quaker schools, and presently an atheist, I can't make heads or tails of the controversy. But it makes entertaining reading, nevertheless.

Of the two stories that Richard Parks mentions as being published in *Galaxy*, Steven Utley's story didn't impress me much. But I thought that Phil Bertoni's story was a classic, or at least a great story. I'm not sure of the story he doesn't mention by name, but I'm pretty sure of which one it is. And I thought all three were science fiction.

One last detail. I wish there was a page of AMAZING and FANTASTIC with a subscription blank on it. Carefully put on the same sheet—I mean back-to-back—with advertisement. This probably would encourage some people who otherwise wouldn't know how to subscribe to subscribe. (Lousy sentence, that last one.)

Not that that's going to stop me from subscribing.

ROBERT NOWALL
6 Martin Road
Poughkeepsie, NY 12601

Dear Ted;

I recall some months ago in an editorial in FANTASTIC that you suggested that your readers urge their local outlets to display FANTASTIC more prominently. I wondered at the time how many would actually do so. I certainly wouldn't. I can't see myself wandering in off the street to tell the pharmacist in charge of the drug store where I buy my copies of FANTASTIC how to run his business. They have a long aisle with book racks, and on one side is an enormous selection of paperbacks, while on the other side (in the next aisle down) are the magazines. On the very bottom (practically on the floor) way underneath the upper shelves are a few digest-size magazines: *EQMM*, *Analog*, FANTASTIC, et al. They are placed with their spines toward the viewer. You have to bend down and practically crawl under the upper shelf even to see what's there. (So much for the attracting-power of a beautiful color cover by Fabian!!!)

For several years I have been buying FANTASTICs in this store. I never paid a great deal of attention, but over the years I have received the impression that they usually get about 5 or 6 copies of the new issue, and I

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buy one, and someone else buys another, and the other 4 remain until the new issue comes in and then are sent into the happy hunting ground of last month's issues. And things were like this—until I got my big Idea.

Now, I haven't got the guts to tell the store manager how to arrange his displays (if I know so much, how come *I'm* not managing the store?). But I am perfectly capable of being *sneaky*. So after reading your editorial, I went back and found about three or four issues of FANTASTIC down in the black hole. I pulled out two of them and casually stuck them among the paperback books (while browsing and buying one or two, of course) . . . among the fantasy and s-f ones. Went back a week or two later and looked around, but couldn't find any copies among the paperbacks; but there was still one left down in the hole, so I took it out and put *it* among the paperbacks too. Next time I visited the store there were no copies of FANTASTIC left, and I looked pretty thoroughly.

Now for the denouement . . . when I went to buy the following issue of FANTASTIC I found only *two* copies there (naturally I put one on the paperback book shelf).

This could mean that they have cut down their order of FANTASTIC suddenly after all these years, but it more likely means that three or four people who like fantasy and s-f have suddenly discovered the existence of FANTASTIC and maybe even liked it enough to go searching for it when the next issue rolled around. In fact, who knows? I may be lucky to find even *one* copy in that store next issue.

The moral, guys (I am now speaking to the readership, Ted, and I am sorry for the male chauvinist piggishness of English, because I include female guys in this category as well as the male ones)—the moral, guys, is that if you want to keep FANTASTIC in operation and boost its sales percentages, without doing anything that could be considered real work—next time you go into your favorite store to buy FANTASTIC or to buy some paperbacks, put a copy or two of the current issue of FANTASTIC among the fantasy paperbacks. In fact, do it with *this* issue—let's make it, "Sell FANTASTIC month" at our corner store.

If we do this, it would be interesting to look at the issues sales later on!

Request time, now. If you can manage to find some space in a future issue for a little free publicity for my publication (such as *Weirdbook*)—and hell, for that matter, for a lot of the *other* worthy semipro magazines now being published—the gesture would be appreciated. And a lot of your readers, who don't know about the limited edition magazine field, might like to learn about it.

W. PAUL GANLEY
Box 35, Amherst Branch
Buffalo, NY 14226

Let me say right off that I think yours is an excellent suggestion, Paul, and one I hope other readers will pick up on. This kind of action may be the only way we have of gaining more visibility on the stands, since we're far too small an operation to have our own "road men" out doing this sort of thing. I might add that it's unlikely that your local pharmacy "cut down their order of FANTASTIC," *since in most localities such orders are meaningless—the store gets what the local distributor wants to give it, and the number of copies is the sole prerogative of the distributor. I remember you as an active fan in the early fifties when I was myself very new to the field, and I'm glad to pass on "a little free publicity" for* Weirdbook, *the Tenth Anniversary issue of which is now out featuring Adrian Cole's novelet, "All Things Dark and Evil;" Michael Bishop's novelet, "Within the Walls of Tyre;" Gerald W. Page's novelet, "The Man*

(cont. on page 131)

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the roadman must have sensed the change. He handed me the chanters' staff.

"But I don't know how to chant."

"Then just hold the staff. It has healing, blessing power. You're ready to receive it now. I can tell."

I sat up and held the staff, while Joseph pounded the drum, beside me. The rainbow reappeared and grew brighter, and suddenly I felt an almost physical sensation of joy. Whatever happened, *had* to be. It was OK.

The light was changing now. Dogs were barking and roosters were crowing. The night outside the dirty windows was changing from black to deep purple. It was nearly day.

The last embers of the fire had subsided into glowing coals, which the fireman began to spread and shovel on the earth floor, into the center of the circle. The fireman carefully arranged the glowing coals into the shape of a large thunderbird, and the chanting began again. The entire group chanting loud and fast to the pulsating beat of the drum.

It grew light, and the coals and the chanting finally died down. Some women came in, carrying pots of food. Deer meat, dried fruit and nuts, beans, tortillas. They pointed in shocked surprise at me, but the roadman hushed them. Suddenly I was ravenous and stuffed the hot food into my mouth. Then I and the others lay down on the floor, exhausted, and fell asleep.

Later that day, we left the cabin and arrived in Coyote by sunset. The town looked totally deserted in the thick snow. But our little adobe house was still there, with Micko, the orange Tom, welcoming me screecho from a window sill.

The clinic trailer was still there, too. Though one end of it looked blackened and charred from a very recent fire. Had Luis done it on purpose as a suicide attempt, or was it accidental?

Luis came out to greet us. He seemed fairly normal, thank god, and welcomed me with a kind, gentle sympathy that was quite unlike him.

"A search party will go out tomorrow," he promised, "to find Leon and the kids."

Then he looked at my foot, a blackish, festering mass, and did what had to be done. It hurt like hell, believe me. But I'll spare you the gory details.

XVI

Spring

SPRING IN THE high mesa country is a wet, muddy affair. The roadways turn into a slimy, yucko soup, and the lifeless sage begins to send out tiny grey/green shoots. The first of the magpies return in the early spring. And the first bit of warm sunchine, after the lean, cold, dark, hngry winter months.

The searchers found the pick-up easily enough, but they never found Leon and the kids. I knew they wouldn't. I miss them terribly. Terribly. But I try to remember what I learned at the sing.

It's OK.

Sometimes I feel really bad, and it's very hard to remember. But then I see the rainbow again, and it helps me remember. It's OK. Because we have survived. Luis and me, and the orange tom cat. Luis and me. The rest of the world is pow. But we have survived.

I don't go very far from the trailer anymore. I can't get around too well

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since I lost my foot. But I'm working at it. Each morning I hobble with Luis down to the mesa to thank god—any god, it doesn't matter any more. Because we have survived. It's OK.

Luis has been surprisingly kind and gentle with me, and I think I might learn to love him someday. But it is hard. He still has his loco spells quite regularly. When his face turns mean and he pulls at my hair. But I try to forgive him. And I try to remember that it's OK.

I hobble with him down to the mesa, every morning at darn.

"Pray," he whispers. "Pray to god. Hail Mary full of grace. The lord our god. The lord is one. Pray for us now and at the hour of our death."

And I pray, in my own way—wordlessly. I pray that I will see the rainbow, and that I will remember it is OK. We have survived. I look out over the grey green plain of the infinite mesa, covered over by the softo dome of the blue, blue sky.

The sky full of clouds in the morning. The great noon sky full of light. The rainbow sky at sunset. The black opal sky at night.

—GRANIA DAVIS

Letters (cont. from page 129)

With the Silver Eyes;" Eddy C. Bertin's novelet, "Something Small, Something Hungry;" Brian Lumley's short, "The Man Who Saw No Spiders;" Basil Wells' short, "Shape in the Shadows;" Darrell Schweitzer's short, "Caliban's Revenge;" and Daphne Castell's short, "The Way Through the Wood;" plus more material including a poem by Robert E. Howard, illustrated by Steve Fabian. This issue, paperbound, sells for $5.00; there will be a limited collector's edition in hardcovers for $15.00. These can be obtained by writing directly to Paul Ganley at the above address; ask him for his information sheets on other publications available from him—there's too much to be boiled down here.—TW

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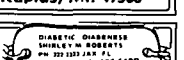

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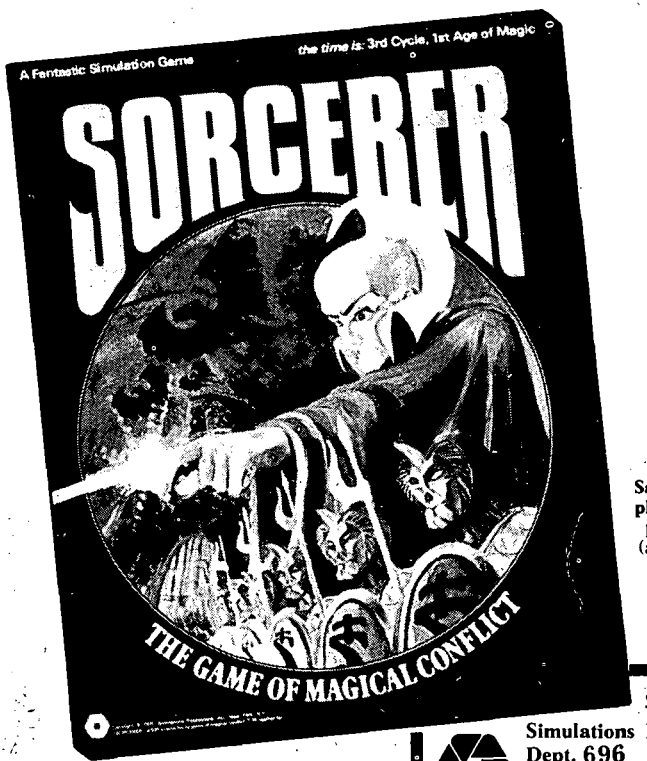

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